

THE ABOLITION OF INTERMARRIAGE IN EZRA 10 AND THE ETHNIC IDENTITY
OF THE POSTEXILIC JUDEAN COMMUNITY: A HERMENEUTIC STUDY

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Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of the Master of Theology in
the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University



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December 2014

Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:

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Abstract

The present study seeks to examine the abolition of intermarriage according to Ezra 10 by asking the question as to what were the compelling reasons for such a social crisis, and to demonstrate its possible implications to ethnic identity in the postexilic Judean community. In order to accomplish this purpose, the researcher has chosen to use an integrated method which allows him to bring different exegetical approaches into dialogue, bearing in mind that the canonical narratives are an outcome of a long process of redaction of both oral and written traditions done by different editors from different socio-historical contexts. It is through this method that this research highlights the following outcomes: first, from a canonical point of view, the final editors understood the exilic experience as an objective outcome of the intermarriage phenomenon which led the Israelites into a complete loss of their group identity, namely – being a Yahwistic community, and it was, therefore, the responsibility of the returnees to avoid, at any cost, letting history repeat itself. Second, the phenomenon of intermarriage in the Hebrew Bible has to be approached from a diachronic perspective. Unlike the patriarchal and deuteronomistic traditions in which intermarriage was about morality and apostasy respectively, in the context of the postexilic community this topic was all about purity – a strong zeal for temple and worship, as particularly witnessed in the priestly tradition. Third, from the fact that these canonical narratives took shape in socio-historical settings where, in addition to the religious factor, there were also other reasons such as political and socio-economic, which contributed significantly not only to the dismissal of those intermarriages, but also to the negotiation of a group identity of the Second Temple addressee. In other words, in response to those socio-historical circumstances, the returnees were compelled to divorce and dismiss their foreign wives and, at the same time, they were shaping their group identity, which came to be known as Judaism.

Opsomming

Hierdie studie poog om die verbod op ondertrouery soos uitgebeeld in Esra 10 te ondersoek deur te vra wat die dwingende redes vir so 'n sosiale krisis was, en om die moontlike implikasies vir etniese identiteit in die posteksiliese Judese gemeenskap te demonstreer. Ten einde hierdie doel te bereik, het die navorser gekies om 'n geïntegreerde metode waarin verskillende eksegetiese benaderings in gesprek gebring word, te gebruik, terwyl in gedagte hou word dat die kanonieke verhale die uitkoms was van 'n lang proses van redaksie van beide mondelinge en geskrewe tradisies, deur verskillende redakteurs uit verskillende sosio-historiese kontekste. Dit is deur middel van hierdie metode dat die navorsing die volgende uitkomst beklemtoon: eerstens, vanuit 'n kanonieke oogpunt, het die finale redakteurs die ballingskapservaring as 'n objektiewe uitkoms van die ondertrouery verstaan wat die Israeliete tot 'n volledige verlies van hul groepsidentiteit as Jahwistiese gemeenskap gelei het, en dit was dus die verantwoordelikheid van die teruggekeerdes om ten alle koste te vermy dat die geskiedenis homself herhaal. Tweedens, die verskynsel van ondertrouery in die Hebreeuse Bybel moet ook vanuit 'n diachroniese perspektief benader word. In teenstelling met die patriargale en deuteronomistiese tradisies waarin ondertrouery oor die boeg van onderskeidelik moraliteit en godsdienstige afvalligheid verstaan is, handel dit in die konteks van die posteksiliese gemeenskap eerder oor reinheid – 'n sterk ywer vir tempel en die erediens soos veral met die priesterlike tradisie geassosieer. Derdens, vanweë die feit dat hierdie kanoniese verhale vorm aangeneem het in sosio-historiese omstandighede waarin, benewens die godsdienstige faktor, daar ook ander faktore, soos die politieke en sosio-ekonomiese, 'n belangrike rol gespeel het, het hierdie verhale aansienlik bygedra nie net tot die verbod op ondertrouery nie, maar ook tot die onderhandeling van die groepsidentiteit van die Tweede Tempel gemeenskap. Met ander woorde, in reaksie op die sosio-historiese omstandighede, was die teruggekeerdes verplig om te skei en hul vreemde vroue te ontslaan, terwyl hul terselfdertyd bygedra het tot die vorming van 'n groepsidentiteit wat bekendstaan as Judaïsme.

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Chapter 1

Background, Research problem, and Methodology

1.1. Introduction and Motivation for Study

Ezra 10 witnesses to the abolition of intermarriage in the postexilic restoration community. This chapter, which has been called a “text of terror” by some scholars (particularly feminist biblical scholars), remains a topic of much discussion and scholarly debate. Does this text reflect the historical reality of the time? Why was intermarriage abolished? What implications did this text have in the circumstances of the postexilic era? And what implications does this text hold for present communities, particularly in their dealings with the issue of intermarriage which is also a modern-day phenomenon? These are some of the difficult questions that are prompted by this biblical text.

One may investigate this chapter in various ways which may all provide valuable insights into the understanding of the text. In order to limit down the present study, however, the aim is not to do an all-encompassing study which approaches the text from all possible and valid angles. It is rather more modest, namely to investigate the driving motivation for the abolition of intermarriage as narrated in Ezra 10 and to establish what were its implications to ethnic identity in the Second Temple Judean Community.

The researcher’s motivation to do this study comes from two different directions. First, John Piper, the pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis wrote: “Opposition to interracial marriage is one of the deepest roots of racial distance, disrespect and hostility. Show me one place in the world where interracial or interethnic marriage is frowned upon and yet the two groups still have equal respect and honor and opportunity. I don’t think it exists. It won’t happen. Why? Because the supposed specter of interracial marriage demands that barrier after barrier must be put up to keep young people from knowing each other and falling in love” (Piper, 2007). Piper describes a racial situation in the USA and many other places around the world. In the researcher’s context (Mozambique), the situation is quite similar, mainly on the tribal and church denominational levels. The Christian community, in particular, finds it difficult to accept intermarriage of people from different tribes and church denominations, even if they are of the same Christian faith. Young people, for example, are encouraged to marry someone from their own tribe and church circle. As a result, most

church denominations are identified with certain tribes and regions. The church also tends to be an ancestral church, the church of the forefathers, where the church members and leadership are to some extent only those who are tribally and regionally related. Moreover, like many other African countries with the great influence of missionary churches, people who accept Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior while living a polygamous life are advised to divorce one/some of their wives, remain with only one, then join the church. Otherwise, in some churches, such people are never allowed to take part of any sacrament, such as baptism and Holy Communion. These churches move in a different direction from that of John Wesley who describes sacraments as means of grace. David Rainey, in his article “The Future of the Wesleyan Theology with a Missional Agenda: Reconciliation and the Eucharist” describes well John Wesley’s Eucharist Theology when he stated: “... that the Lord’s Supper was ordained by God to be a *means of conveying* to men either *preventing* or *justifying*, or *sanctifying grace* ... that no *fitness* is required at the time of communicating but a *sense of our state*, of our utter sinfulness and helplessness; everyone who knows he is *fit for hell* being just *fit to come to Christ*... Now the mission of the church has been identified. At the Lord’s Table all are invited and depending on a person’s spiritual state, it is possible to experience the awareness of sin and the need of Christ – preventing grace, or a conversion to Christ – justifying grace, or growth in holiness – sanctifying grace” (2014:4). In other more conservative churches this view is ignored. For that reason, some of those polygamists find it easier to leave the church and never come back again to faith. Acknowledging how difficult and problematic this issue has been and continues to be for the Church in general, Bedru Hussein posed some very crucial questions, “How then can the church be sensitive to the people and be faithful to the Bible? If polygamy is prohibited in the church, who is going to give care for the abandoned wives and their children? When a polygamous husband becomes a Christian does it mean the rest of his household will be lost?” (Hussein, 2002:82).

A second motivation is the following: Many African Theologians have used Ezra-Nehemiah texts in their quest for a theology of renewal and reconstruction. According to Elelwani Farisani, some of these theologians only listen to the voice of the narrator and do not put an effort into hearing the voice of the silenced ones. In this case of Ezra 10, this is what he said, “Moreover, there are in Ezra-Nehemiah women who were forcefully divorced from their husbands. The fact that we do not hear their cry does not mean that they did not cry nor does it mean that they approved of their oppression, rather their silence is due to the fact that they

have been silenced by the authors of the text of Ezra-Nehemiah” (Farisani, 2003). On the one hand, the researcher finds this to be a very important and helpful comment, especially for women and children who find themselves in a polygamous situation and later are left with no one to take care of them simply because the husband/father hides behind the church to avoid his responsibilities. On the other hand, he is fully aware of the increasing rate of plurality of religion and agrees with the statement found in the Africa Bible Commentary which says, “Africa, like other countries in the world, is seeing a rise in religious pluralism. If we do not pay attention, we risk losing our identity for the sake of tolerance. But note that we are speaking here of our personal and spiritual identity and not of our societies which we should tolerate pluralism... The decision to send away the pagan women was taken in the context where the very survival of the Jewish community was at stake, and should not be taken as a rule for the church” (Weanzana, 2006:542).

These two motivations which come from the researcher’s own context will drive our research into the dynamic of intermarriage which played off in the postexilic situation and which is reflected in biblical texts from that era. The methods chosen for this study (as will be explained later) will not only be appropriate for the research question that will drive our investigation, but will also be sensitive the context within which the researcher conducted this project. Our hope is that studying those texts might provide some guidelines for the discussion in the researcher’s context, as mentioned above.

This study will not immediately go over to explaining the problem statement that will be investigated. Since Ezra 10 is such a rich text with a vast amount of scholarly work that had already been done on the text, it would be wise to first engage in literature study to discern the trends in scholarship on this passage, and to determine what possibilities there are for further investigation.

The overview of literature provided in this chapter will therefore first study the socio-historical background of the exilic and post-exilic periods in Israel’s history (in 1.2), as well as the general background of Ezra-Nehemiah’s writings (in 1.3), aiming to understand, from a canonical¹ perspective, the exilic experience and its implications in the history of Israel as a

¹ With “canonical” we refer in this study to the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible which serves as canonical scriptures for the Jewish faith community, but also as Old Testament for the Protestant Christian community.

nation. Thereafter, the research problem and accompanying research questions will be formulated (in 1.4), the hypothesis of the study will be explained (in 1.5), and the methodology of the study will be motivated (in 1.6).

Chapter two will focus on a literary analysis of the text itself, in its final form, and on different genres and key terms implied in the text. This will be followed by an analysis of Ezra 10 in the context of Ezra-Nehemiah's writing, in chapter three, with special focus on the redaction and editorial activities which occurred up to the final text. After these analyses, we will move on to chapter four and address Ezra 10 in a broader literary context to find out what other biblical texts, such as the patriarchal narratives, the Deuteronomistic and prophetic literature, and other writings (Ruth, Esther and Proverbs) say about intermarriage. Chapter five will attempt to address the possible socio-historical circumstances that might have contributed to the settlement of the foreign women in the land, their engagement in intermarriages to the returnees, and the dissolution of such intermarriages in Ezra 10. Finally, in chapter six we will look at the implication of Ezra 10 in the formation of a group identity, which later came to be known as the Judean community. All biblical references will be taken from the New International Version: Study Bible, 10th edition.

1.2.Literature Study on the Fall of Jerusalem and beyond

As stated above, this literature study is not meant to be a critical discussion or any sort of evaluation, as one would expect. Instead, it is meant to provide a general background of the field of study of the present research, so that when we come to identify the problem statement, below in 1.4, we will have already acquired the necessary and sufficient information about the main arguments and the meaning of central concepts which will guide this study.

The fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 587/6 B.C. and the three subsequent deportations of its inhabitants, namely 597, 587/6, and 582 (Kessler 2008:121), not only meant physical destruction and geographical dislocation, but it also meant that ancient Israel had lost their identity. Bruce C. Birch put it correctly when he said: "This was more than a matter of geographic removal. For Israel exile was a cultural, political and religious upheaval" (Birch, 2013). Both the Patriarchal and Mosaic traditions, which made them different from other people of the Mesopotamian nations, were at risk of not being passed on to the next generations; the temple of Solomon which indicated their religious existence and

centralization of worship was in ruins; the monarch together with his military regime, which defended them in times of political crisis, had been overpowered and subjected to a foreign government; and the land, the only means of their economic survival, had been taken away by people from other nations. In fact, Rainer Kessler said this about the economic system of Israel before the exile: “We need not waste many words explaining that the dominant economic system of pre-state Israel was farming combined with animal husbandry on site” (Kessler, 2008:59). This devastation marked, historically speaking, the end of ancient Israel’s pre-exilic era.

According to Kessler (2008:26), during the exile the people of Judah were divided into two groups and had two kings. King Jehoiachin lived in Babylon with other deportees, and Zedekiah remained in Jerusalem with the majority. Among the deportees were the king’s skilled people (the craftsmen and artisans), the scribes, priests and prophets. Jacob M. Myers stated “Only members of the upper classes and experts in certain crafts, together with the court, were taken to Babylon” (Myers 1965). In fact, this is what the witness of the canonical text says, “But the commander left behind some of the poorest people of the land to work the vineyard and fields” (2 Kings 25:12). From these statements, one can easily understand that there was a great difference between these two groups as far as literacy, socio-economic and political status were concerned. Those in exile had a significantly wider world-view, and were far more literate and more stable socio-economically than those in the homeland.

For the benefit of this study, it is important to briefly point out the life conditions in both locations, in the exile and in the homeland. In contrast to the exile, the life in general of the people in the land was what Myers describes as a “power vacuum”. According to Myers, those who were left behind by the Babylonian commander to work in the vineyard and fields were without a power system to rule and maintain order in the land, and for that reason, Myers stated that “Power vacuum created conditions for all sorts of insecurity” (Myers, 1965:xx). Some people took advantage of the situation by behaving the way they desired and doing anything they wanted. Even in our modern societies we witness many situations where national or local governments are out of control. In such situations all the borders become open, and people go in and out at any time and in any manner. The rate of crime (killing, robbery, rape, destruction of the economy and other sorts of human and environmental abuse) grows high. As a result, people live in extreme poverty. This was the case with those who remained in the land. After the Babylonian devastation, the nation was out of control;

criminals took the opportunity to satisfy their bad intentions; people fled to other places for safety; and others from the neighboring areas came in and took possession of the land and properties left by the deportees. Consequently, the people in the land, as both the canonical text and Erhard S. Gerstenberger (2002:208) describe them, were “the poorest of the land”.

With regard to the deportees, both biblical and extra biblical sources indicate that they were both socio-economically and religiously well settled (Myers, 1965:xxi). Scholars believe that the exilic experience also meant the transferring of the Judean political power from Jerusalem to Babylon. King Jehoiachin together with his court continued to hold power and authority at least over the deportees in their settlements. Besides, the deportees had taken into consideration Jeremiah’s instructions when he said, “This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ‘Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters... also seek the peace, and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile’” (Jer. 29:5-7). In a spirit of obedience to these instructions, the exiles took advantage of their skillful qualities to achieve their socio-economic and religious status. The skilled ones (craftsmen and artisans) came to a certain point that they got hold of profitable businesses, while the literate ones, served alongside with the Babylonian government as scribes, sages, cupbearers, priests and governors. For instance, Nehemiah was King Artaxerxes I’s cupbearer; Ezra served as a priest during the reign of Artaxerxes II; Esther was taken queen by King Xerxes; Daniel (Balteshazzar), Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego) were appointed governors by King Nebuchadnezzar (if some of these narratives would be regarded as back projections of historical events in Babylon).

In addition to their socio-economic stability, and literary and skillful qualities, the deportees, still in their settlements, had the opportunity to reason together and talk about their past experience and the future of their identity. Gerstenberger (2002:208) understands this phenomenon of living together in a foreign land to be one of the strongest tools used by the minority to maintain their identity, when he said, “Perhaps this fact of living together was decisive, since experience shows that emigrants and those who are forcibly deported like to maintain protected groups which, when they exceed a certain critical mass, have chances of preserving their culture over a long period”. This was the case with the dispersed people of Judah. The scribes and priests, who had been exiled, such as Ezra, Jeshua and others, had instituted a spiritual center in Babylon among the exiles for the interpretation and the

teaching of the collected patriarchal and Mosaic traditions (Levin, 2005: 96). As they did so, they came to understand that the promise given to their Father Abraham which says, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates – the land of Kenites, Kenizzites, Kedmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites” (Gen. 15:18-20) was still to be fulfilled. This understanding played a great role in their definition of who the people of Israel were, as addressed below.

The prophets, on the other hand, had two different major approaches to the Babylonian experience. The first one was the Deuteronomistic approach. The exilic experience was a direct outcome of the people of Judah’s disobedience to Yahweh, as prophet Jeremiah cries out: “Therefore, the Lord Almighty says this: ‘Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin’” (Jer. 25:8-9). The second approach was that of hope. Out of the bitter experience, Yahweh was still going to bring a new life, as it reads: “This is what the Lord says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place’” (Jer. 29:10); “The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from the captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess, says the Lord” (Jer. 30:3). Claassens (2013) in her article entitled “The Rhetorical Function of the Woman in Labor Metaphor in Jeremiah 30-31: Perspectives on Creation and the Land” wrote, “For the survivors of the Babylonian exile, one could similarly say that the connotation for new life that is associated with the Woman in Labor metaphor in Jeremiah 31 is a creative means of conceptualizing their survival as people – the notion of giving birth used to denote the future God will give to the people in the land”. The point here is that like a woman who goes through severe labor pains in order to bring new life in the world, it was thus with the bitter experience of the people of Judah in Babylon whose end was to bring new hope and new life in their homeland.

At last, the promise that was proclaimed by the prophets was fulfilled in 539 B.C. The Persians under the command of Cyrus overpowered the Babylonians and granted all the captives freedom to return to their homeland. That was the beginning of the era of the Second

Temple Community, and the writings of Ezra-Nehemiah stand as one of the foundations for the re-institution and identity formation of this new community. Brueggemann (2004: 363) said it as follows, “It is clear that literary form and the interpretative intention of the two books is all of a piece; together they present with great intentionality the formation of the late community of Judaism, led by leadership from the Persian deportation, as the legitimate community occupying Jerusalem that practiced the Torah of YHWH”.

Now the question which one might ask could be as to how the two eras – ancient Israel and the Second Temple Judean Community – were related to one another. The answer is that they were different and yet the latter was a continuation of the former. According to Breneman (1993:50), “One of the chief objectives of Ezra-Nehemiah was to show the Jews that they constituted the continuation of the pre-exilic Jewish community, the Israelite community that God had chosen. Thus, they were to see in this community a continuation of God’s redemptive activity”. Unlike the ancient Israelite community, which was built on the Davidic monarchy, the postexilic community focused on a nation where Yahweh would be the ruler. The people of Israel had realized that although the Davidic dynasty was of paramount importance for their identity and their Messianic hope, the trust they had put on those human kings had led them far away from Yahweh. The Bible says that “Ahaziah son of Ahab became king of Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned over Israel two years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, because he walked in the ways of his father and mother and in the ways of Jeroboam son of Nabat, who caused Israel to sin” (1 Kings 22: 51-52). Ahaziah is one among many kings such as Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri and Ahab reported in 1 Kings 15 – 16, who did evil in the eyes of the Lord and led the people of Israel to sin. It was through the influence of those idolatrous earthly kings that Israel, as a nation, came to forsake the God of their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, by not obeying the Law of Moses and not listening to the warnings of the prophets, an attitude that had caused them to be slaves to foreign and ungodly nations. The new community, therefore, had longed for God’s kingdom (Levin, 2005:122) and no longer for a human led nation.

One more element of discontinuity that should not be ignored in this study is through the measures taken by Ezra and Nehemiah in their attempt to redeem the identity of Israel – the dissolution of intermarriages and the sending away of foreign men, women and children. Bob Becking argues that these norms seem to stand in a contradicting position to the Torah of

Moses when he said, “These measures, although rigid implications of the Torah, are difficult to understand against all what is said in the Torah of Moses about protection of the poor and the needy” (Becking, 2011:38). This means that while the faith of the fathers was to care for the fatherless, the widow and the foreigner, as it is said, “He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loved the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt” (Deut. 10:18-19), the faith of Ezra’s intended readers in Second Temple community was based on self-centeredness and self-satisfaction by sending away all foreigners in their midst.

Still with these differences, the two eras were related to one another in many ways. Some of them will be highlighted in this study. Brown (2009) outlines some elements of continuity and calls them “Continuity with the past and hope for the future”. One is in relation to the genealogies found in the writings of Ezra-Nehemiah. They are an indication that only those whose family names are in the list are the legitimate descendants of the pre-exilic Israel, and therefore are to go back to their ancestral property. The other one is related to the city of Jerusalem. One of the major reasons why the returnees put their claims on Jerusalem and not Shechem or Gilead or somewhere else is because Jerusalem was the capital of the ancient Israel. One more continuity with the past suggested by Brown is called national continuity. In their patriarchal traditions the name Israel is connected to Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes. The exiles refused to associate themselves with the Persian provinces, which were already established and fairly organized such as Samaria and Trans-Euphrates, mainly because of a sense of nationality; the *golah* was a resurrection of the pre-exilic Israel.

In addition to the above ways of continuity between the pre- and postexilic eras, there is the new community’s identity that went as far back as the patriarchal time and came up to their recent Babylonian experience. They claimed to be the children of Abraham and recalled the memories about their great heroes, such as Moses and David. G. J. Wenham summarizes it as follows, “In the light of the perplexing circumstances of the exile outlined above, it was important for those who returned to Jerusalem and those who followed them to be reassured that they stood in the same line of faith as their forefathers” (Wenham, 1994:432). The second way the two eras were related is through the concept of the temple. The fact that the second temple was built right on the foundations of the first one – the Temple of Solomon, and not somewhere else, gives a clear indication that one of the main purposes was to maintain continuity between the two eras – the second temple is a continuation of the first.

The third is what Williamson identifies as lines of institutional continuity which include “the temple vessels, the cultic practices and the role of the Levites” (Becking, 2011:36). It is quite interesting to note that the new temple was equipped with the old vessels that were used in the first temple, as it is clearly indicated in Ezra 1:7-11. Both the practices of festivals and sacrifices were not new. Instead, they were revived from those of pre-exilic times. The same happened with the priestly offices. The writer/editor of Ezra, for example, traces the lineage of Ezra all the way back to Aaron the chief priest (Ezra 7:1-5). However, Becking argues that these lines of institutional continuity should not be viewed as historically justified records; they are simply a part of Ezra-Nehemiah’s belief-system. Here we see the power of the rhetoric implied by the author of Ezra-Nehemiah. His major aim was to persuade his audiences to believe and then be convinced that the returnees were the true and legitimate heirs of their forefathers’ spiritual inheritance. The fourth is what Bob Becking calls the “confined community” in which, according to him, the concept of election was not derived from the people of the Second Temple themselves; it has roots in the Deuteronomistic tradition. In Ezra-Nehemiah’s understanding, both ‘holy nation’ and ‘seed of Abraham or holy seed’ have the same meaning. The fifth is related to the role played by Cyrus, the Emperor of Persia. According to the Cyrus edict (Ezra 1:1-4), God of heaven and earth had used Cyrus to accomplish His divine plans. The returning of the deportees to their homeland is a continuation of the deportation itself, and Cyrus serves as the bridge between the two. This takes us to different views about the Persian rulers’ involvement in the process of the Israelites’ returning to their homeland.

There are different interpretations about the role of the Persian rulers in the whole process of the fulfillment of this promise – the returning of the exiles to their homeland. One interpretation approaches this issue from a literary point of view. Scholars have maintained that Cyrus and his successors were aware of the fact that Judah and Israel had been ruled by rebellious kings in the past (Dozeman, 2003:463), and to change the situation, they decided to establish a religious nation by sending, together with the returnees, a religious leader, who would introduce not only political but religious and moral laws. This approach sides with the accusation set up against the rebuilding of the temple by those labeled as enemies of Judah and Benjamin in Ezra 4:12:16. Another interpretation is from a historical approach which supports that Persian rulers, including Cyrus and his successors, had believed that they were chosen by the chief deity, Ahura Mazda, to assume the kingship office (Gerstenberger,

2011:46), and their political success depended on their positive attitude towards the gods of their subjects. They were then motivated by this belief to release the exiles to their homeland and then to order them to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem so that prayers, worship and sacrifices would take place, and consequently, God would be pleased and bless the ruling nobility, as it reads in Ezra 6:10. Goswell in his article on “The Attitude to the Persians in Ezra-Nehemiah” commented that the Persian rulers’ emphasis on the sacrifices and offerings to the God of Israel, followed by the capital punishment for those who would choose to not obey the kings’ orders in Ezra 6: 3-12; 7:26 reveal that “Religion was being used as an arm of political policy. Thus it becomes apparent that the actions of the kings were thoroughly self-serving” (Goswell, 2011:192). However, Lester L. Grabbe, in representation of other modern scholars who repudiate the hypothesis that the Persian rulers promoted religion, stated: “it has often been asserted that the Persian government promoted local cults, but I have argued that this was not the case” (Grabbe, 2004:78). He goes on to ask rhetorical questions as to how would a government that just took over such multi-racial empire, probably with huge challenges to protect the borders from both external invaders and internal rebellions in order to keep it running peacefully, invest such big lumps of money and other imperial resources to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem? Was not Phoenicia the better strategic place than Judah in terms of economic and political affairs of the empire? Grabbe and other scholars insist that the interest for cultic worship did not come from the Persian authority, but from the subjects themselves. Therefore, the Cyrus Cylinder has to be viewed as mere imperial religious propaganda (Becking, 2011:9).

The above approach is embraced by Kyong-Jin Lee (2011) in his advocacy to Peter Frei’s theory of imperial authorization of the Pentateuch. According to Lee, the Achaemenid Empire had very big and serious challenges while governing its multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-lingual subjects. In order to maintain “*Pax Persica*” in the whole empire, the central governing body introduced a different governing policy from those who came before and after them. Instead, the Achaemenid Empire decentralized the power to regional and provincial governors together with the imperial satraps. These regional governors were given enough authority and power to work out their own local and contextualized norms which would be adopted and protected within the entire imperial system. In answering the question as to why some of the documents appear with the emperor’s name, this is what Lee said, “In most instances the king lent his name to local authorities who undertook their judicial

authority with measured independence and freedom” (Lee, 2011:10). Lee goes on to bring a few examples of this power decentralization. Besides the very known and famous canonical text – the Cyrus Cylinder, one example is Cambyses’ authorization of the local norms on behalf of Udjahoresnet, a priest and high-ranking official in Egypt to reinstate the Temple of Neith. The other example is the one entitled the ‘Passover Letter in Elephantine’ which a certain Jew by the name of Ananiah wrote to his countrymen living in Elephantine to inform them about the dates and the importance of observing the festival of the Passover. In his agreement with other modern scholars, Lee highlighted the fact that the initiative for any religious norm or activity was not from the imperial central government but from the provincial governing corps.

In spite of these and other views about the Persians’ role in this process, the canonical form of Ezra-Nehemiah’s text indicates that Cyrus was a ruler chosen and sent by God to play a part in this redemptive activity – to bring God’s people back home and build the temple in Jerusalem to the Lord of heaven and earth. (Ezra 1: 2-4). Cyrus and his successors, therefore, had to use their political power and both human and imperial material resources to fulfill this sacred mission; they had to bridge this continuity between the pre-exilic and postexilic communities. The approximately fifty thousand exiles who first returned to Jerusalem, in response to Cyrus edict, had dedicated themselves to the rebuilding of the temple which was Cyrus’ priority. They completed and dedicated it to the Lord around 520 – 515 B.C. (McKenzie and Kaltner, 2009:363). Soon after that, the worship system was re-established according to ancient Israel’s tradition. In Ezra 6:15-22, for instance, the writer describes a very important event for the people of Israel – the dedication of the Temple, almost as it is in 1 Kings 8: 62-66 with all kinds of holy sacrifices and offerings and the feasts of Tabernacles and Passover. The writer also stated the important role of the priests and Levites, “And they installed the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their groups for the service of God of Israel, according to what is written in the Book of Moses” (Ezra 6:18). In this case the reference to the Book of Moses might be related to what is said in Numbers 3: 5-9 “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Bring the tribe of Levi and present them to Aaron the priest to assist him. They are to perform duties for him and for the whole community at the Tent of Meeting by doing the work of the tabernacle. They are to take care of all the furnishings of the Tent of Meeting, fulfilling the obligations of the Israelites by doing the work of the tabernacle’”.

However, something as important as the temple and worship was missing in this new community – the knowledge of the Law of Moses. As it is indicated above, the Law of Moses was one of the key elements that bridged the continuity between the pre- and the postexilic communities. For many decades both the returnees and those of the land had been worshipping the Lord in the temple but did not know the Law which God had given to their forefathers. Consequently, the people were not able to discern what was right and what was not before the Lord until 465 – 424 when Artaxerxes (Keck, 2007:145), one of the Persian rulers, commissioned Ezra, “the scribe well invested in the Law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel had given” (Ezra 7:6), to go to Jerusalem. He was sent to Jerusalem to enquire about the Law of the Lord God of Israel. This is where the issue of intermarriage comes to the surface and divorce is promulgated in Ezra 10. Though there are different opinions among scholars as to whether Ezra 10 is associated with Ezra the scribe or someone else, some of those who associate Ezra-Nehemiah’s writings with 1 and 2 Chronicles started by questioning the historical existence of Ezra and then concluded that there had never been separate Ezra memoirs (Williamson, 1985:xxix). It was the work of the editor to idealize a personality that would act like Ezra the scribe. Other scholars consider Nehemiah 8 – 10 as a part of the Ezra memoirs, as found in Ezra 8 – 10 (Dillard and Longman III, 1994:181). They hold to the assumption that despite the editorial work that the writing of Ezra-Nehemiah experienced during the Second Temple period at a later time (Frevel, 2011:78), it was Ezra the scribe who read the Law of Moses in Nehemiah 8, prayed for the sins of the returnees in Ezra 9, and led the Israelites to confession of their sins in Ezra 10 and Nehemiah 9. All these actions culminated in a written, binding seal by both the Levites and priests and the proclamation of the dismissal of intermarriages in Nehemiah 9 and Ezra 10 respectively.

The final text does not provide us with a very detailed background as to why the leaders of the people of Israel came to Ezra and reported the issue of intermarriage among the returnees. It simply says that this happened just after Ezra and those companions who came with him to Jerusalem had weighed and delivered the treasures they brought from Babylon to the house of the Lord and placed them into the hands of the priests and Levites. It is possible that Ezra also taught the Law of Moses before or after having delivered all those temple articles, as well as the king’s orders to the royal satraps and to the governor of Trans-Euphrates, as it is indicated in Ezra 8:35 – 36. The people responded to the teachings by repenting from an action that was prohibited by the Lord whom they had been worshipping all along. Having

mentioned the law Ezra read to the returnees, it would be advantageous for this study to indicate the common approach taken by modern scholars in this regard.

One of the concerns raised by modern biblical scholars about the law which Ezra brought from Babylon and read among the returnees in Jerusalem (Neh. 8) is whether that law, which was in his hands (Ezra 7:14b), was a complete Pentateuch, as it is now, or if it was a portion of it. A concern of this nature would probably be handled well by students in the area of text redaction. Erhard S. Gerstenberger (2011) outlines at least three key aspects which an Old Testament student is encouraged to consider as far as the redaction of the Old Testament text is concerned. One, the Old Testament had been in an oral form until the Babylonian exile when the deportees started to collect those oral traditions (Priestly and Deuteronomistic) and, with the influence of the Babylonian high writing system, compiled them into a written document. Two, the primary motivation for collecting those oral traditions was the public reading and not the call for writing. Three, community and communal worship were the driving forces for the collection of the Torah oral traditions. Now the question as to whether the law Ezra took along with him to Jerusalem was the complete Pentateuch or only a portion of it still has no clear and straight-forward answer. What seems to be certain to modern scholars as well as to this writing, however, is that it was directly identified with the Pentateuch.

To summarize, this study thus far has indicated that the Babylonian experience meant more than physical locomotion from one geographical place to another. Instead it was an extinction of the Israelite and Judahite people's identity – their real socio-economic, political and moral-religious existence. The writings of Ezra-Nehemiah play a great role in the process of physical-spiritual identity formation of the postexilic community. Lasor, Hubbard and Bush have rightly stated, "If Ezra reestablished Israel spiritually, Nehemiah gave the fragile community physical stability" (2003:562-563). Most obvious, we recognize Nehemiah's role that which protects the people of God from their enemies, the unclean 'Gentiles.' On the other hand, Ezra's notable mission was to erect a spiritual boundary between Israel and all the other people through the reading and observance of the law of God. In essence, Ezra's law, which included a strong emphasis on the prohibition of intermarriage, constituted a people fit to live within Nehemiah's protected community. At the end of the book of Ezra we find an ideology which gives an impression that here is a holy group of people dwelling in a holy city (Dillard and Longman III, 1994: 187). These writings indicate that the Babylonian experience was a

transition from the era of ancient Israel to postexilic Jewish community. The two eras were different from each other, and yet the new was a continuation of God's redemptive work which started in the ancient days. From the point of view of Ezra-Nehemiah's writings, God had then used the Persian rulers as well as Ezra and Nehemiah to accomplish this divine work – to re-establish a holy nation exclusively belonging to Him. As to what the issues of intermarriage and divorce had to do with the identity formation of the new community, we now turn to that point.

1.3. The Postexilic Community, its Literature, and its Views on Intermarriage

Like other Old Testament literature, the writings of Ezra-Nehemiah do not give a clear indication as far as authorship and date are concerned. When addressing this particular topic, one is faced with at least three leading questions. One is the chronological position where these texts are presented in Hebrew Bible and in our modern Bible versions; the second is how 1 and 2 Chronicles are related to Ezra-Nehemiah; and the third is whether the writings of Ezra-Nehemiah are one or two independent literary works. To the first question, Charles F. Fensham (1982:1) brings to our attention the fact that while in the Hebrew Bible the writings of Chronicles come after Ezra-Nehemiah, in our modern Bible version it is the opposite. He then observes that the reason may possibly be that the writings of Ezra-Nehemiah were received in the canon before Chronicles. However, regardless of this chronological position found in both the Hebrew Bible and in most of our modern Bible versions, the question related to the writings of Chronicles is basically due to the fact that the latter starts where the former ends, namely the imperial edict in 2 Chronicles 36: 23 and in Ezra 1:2-4. Modern scholars have challenged the traditional theory which gives the authorship accreditation of both compositions to one single person or school. Gordon F. Davies (1999:x), for instance, observed that the duplication between the end of Chronicles and the beginning of Ezra complicates rather than solves the debate about the common authorship. Moreover, Leander E. Keck, after having examined the theological differences between the two literary compositions, came to a conclusion that 1 and 2 Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah are two separate and independent works (Keck, 2007:144). According to him, there are various elements that draw the distinction between the two. First, the idea of retribution which is one of the leading themes in Chronicles is less evident in Ezra-Nehemiah. Second, while the Chronicler favored the Davidic succession of the people of Israel, the writings of Ezra-

Nehemiah approach the new community from the perspective of Abrahamic election. Third, the Chronicler approached the Samaritan tribes with a more positive attitude than that of the Ezra-Nehemiah's writer/editor. Fourth, Gary N. Knoppers argues that there is a great difference in how the two literary works approach the origin of the people of Israel in the Second Temple context when he said, "The authors/editors of Chronicles, like the authors/editors of Ezra-Nehemiah, exhibit a strong sense of collective identity that is rooted in the past, but the authors of Chronicles define identity much more broadly, intricately, and deeply than the writers of Ezra-Nehemiah do... the writers of Chronicles are keenly interested in genealogy as a critical means to define and secure ethnic identity" (Knoppers 2011:176). In fact the Chronicler spends the first nine chapters tracing the genealogy of the people of Israel, starting with Adam and Eve. It is argued that one of the main objectives of the writer is to demonstrate that humankind, regardless of special religious privileges that any ethnic group might have, including the Second Temple intended readers, are from the same ancestral origin – Adam and Eve.

In relation to the second question, the major issue is the nature of unity found in the writings of Ezra-Nehemiah. On the one hand they appear to be a single work, as Fensham (1982:1) indicated that from the literary order, the two works have all along been regarded as one book – the book of Ezra, until the 3rd century A.D. when Father Origen decisively categorized them in two different books and called them 1 and 2 Ezra. Later, based on Nehemiah 1:1, Luther called 2 Ezra the book of Nehemiah. On the other hand these two books (Ezra-Nehemiah) seem to be of contemporary authors. Both Ezra and Nehemiah moved in the same direction for the same mission – commissioned by the Persian authority from Babylon to Jerusalem to help re-establish the new community. Were they really contemporaries? The understanding from the text itself is that Ezra came first to Jerusalem with the third group of the returnees in 458 B. C. then Nehemiah with the fourth in 445 B. C. This possibility, again from the canonical point of view, makes sense when taken into account that Ezra does not mention anything about Nehemiah in his memoirs (EM), and yet Ezra appears in the writings of Nehemiah 8. Jacob M. Myers said it correctly, "It has been observed that nowhere in the memoirs of Ezra is Nehemiah mentioned or even alluded to" (Myers, 1965: xxxvi). However, these dates have been challenged in two different studies. One is that of the reading of the Law of Moses. It has been argued that if Ezra came first with one major purpose, to teach the Law of God of heaven and earth to those in the land, he would have not waited

thirteen years to do it. This argument has invited historical scholars into more studies whose findings regard Ezra as having been commissioned by Artaxerxes II (404 – 358) and Nehemiah by Artaxerxes I (465 – 424) and, therefore, Nehemiah as having come to Jerusalem before Ezra (McKenzie and Kaltner, 2009:363).

Still with all these complications and uncertainties about date and authorship, the prevailing hypothesis is that the unity between the two books confirms the editorial work of the scribes. It is possible that during the Persian dominion, around 457 – 420 B.C, a single school or person whether “Ezra, Nehemiah, or another recognized teacher of Israel” (Breneman, 1993:41) drew out information from different sources such as memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah, lists of names of the returnees, the Cyrus Cylinder and other imperial documents, special teachings of the Law of Moses by Ezra, and prayers of Ezra and Nehemiah, and then compiled them into one document to justify and explain the formation of this new community of God’s people. Both Ezra and Nehemiah proposed that the returning of the exiles to their homeland was a fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham. From Abraham’s descendants, God would raise a great nation whose identity would be characterized by their belonging exclusively to Yahweh. We turn now to this point in the next paragraphs.

For the sake of emphasis, it is mentioned in the previous section that the days had come that both the promise given to Abraham and the prophecy had to be fulfilled. God had moved the heart of Cyrus, the mighty king of the Persian Empire, to officially grant to the people of Israel freedom to go to their homeland. This ruler not only gave them freedom but also provided them with all the necessary means for their settlement into the land. This fulfillment, however, had implication in regards to who was the object of the promise. According to Ezra-Nehemiah, there should be a clear understanding of who was the beneficiary of this covenant and prophetic promise. Who were the true and legitimate descendants of Abraham and the “my people Israel and Judah”? Were they those once exiled in Babylon and then returned to Jerusalem or those who remained in the land during the deportation, or both?

Sociological studies have shown that the writings of Ezra-Nehemiah clearly emphasized the returnees from the Babylonian exile as the true and pure remnant, the true and legitimate children of Israel (Farisani, 2003:36). These were the ones called to possess the land which had been promised to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were the ones to go

back to Jerusalem and be the kingdom of priests and the holy nation. As to the question of what about those who remained in the land, the argument is based on the hostage relocation assumption. When the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem and destroyed the city, they took all the inhabitants captive and quickly repopulated the land with other subjects from the neighboring nations. However, this assumption has been challenged by historical and source-critical scholars. According to them, the empty land is simply a myth; it was only the elite class and some of the urban people that were deported, but the majority of Abraham's lineage remained in the land (Esler, 2003:430). Rainer Kessler handled this issue from the historical point of view and said, "It is certainly that the later picture of a complete emptying of the Land is historically untenable. Probably the number of exiles lay between a fourth and, at the maximum, a third of the population" (Kessler, 2008:121). Moreover, it has been mentioned in the previous paragraphs that when the ruling corps of any nation is out of control over the order within the Empire, the result is chaos and uncontrollable entrances and exits. In this case, it is highly possible that after the Babylonian terrorization, people from the neighboring nations migrated in and possessed the desolated lands. Besides, during that time the whole Mediterranean region was under political pressure. For instance, Myers (1965) believes that it is possible that immigrants from Edom who were under the Arabian imperial threat infiltrated the southern part of Judah. These phenomena partially justify the presence of foreigners in the land.

The hypothesis of the *golah* being the true Israel is also advocated by biblical scholars who approach Ezra-Nehemiah's writings from a canonical point of view. The main argument here is based on the list of names of the returnees found in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7. These lists were not for the ruling power as suggested by the literary analyst. They were for the returnees themselves in order to make it clear who really belonged to the group, as it is well said: "The purpose of the list, therefore, is to indicate who constitutes the people (that is, who is a member of this particular ethnic group) and who has certain valuable roles within it (such as priests and Levite). It is exclusionary in nature – only those so listed (or, we must suppose, their attested descendants) and no one else constitutes Israel" (Esler, 2003:419). The point here is that if the lists were for the ruling authorities, they would obviously be for political and economic control and would tend to be as accommodating as possible to all the inhabitants of the land. Besides, the introductory informative statements in Ezra 2:2, "The list of the men of the people of Israel" and Nehemiah 7:7 "The list of the men of Israel", seem

to indicate that anyone else whose family name did not appear in the list, even with other kind of proofs, would not be considered as one of the remnant.

Furthermore, scholars in the field of text-criticism suggest that it is very important for a student of Second Temple Judean literature to know that the writings of Ezra-Nehemiah, like many other Old Testament texts, have gone through an editorial process before coming to their final form. Some records have been moved from their original places to somewhere else, and that has significantly changed the original perspectives of the text. Juha Pakkala in his journal on “Intermarriage and Group Identity in the Ezra Tradition” (Pakkala, 2011:82) observed that when Ezra-Nehemiah is approached from a canonical method, it gives an impression that Ezra’s main mission to Jerusalem was to dismiss intermarriages in order to re-institute Israel’s identity. However, when the same text is approached from a textual critical point of view, it presents a totally different theme which appears to be the re-introduction of the Law of Moses to both returnees and those who had remained in the land during deportation. Pakkala goes on to say that these two perspectives are due to the fact that before the editorial work happened, Nehemiah 8 was originally right before Ezra 9, meaning that the repentance of the Israelites in Ezra 9, which resulted in abolition of intermarriage in Ezra 10, was an outcome of the reading of the Law of God in Ezra 8 (the actual Nehemiah 8). In other words, the final form of Nehemiah 8 is the background of the original text of Ezra 9 and 10. Having touched on Ezra 10, which is the main focus in this study, we now turn our attention to some key issues around the dismissal of intermarriages and group identity, such as Intermarriage and Divorce, Israel’s Holy Seed, and Purity Identity.

Starting with a textual approach, it is very important to mention that if any dismissal of intermarriages, which is recorded in Ezra 10, ever took place in history, two things have to be taken into consideration. First, Christian Frevel, Benedikt J. Conczorowski, and many other modern biblical scholars propose that the subject of exogamy versus endogamy in the Hebrew Bible in general and the Second Temple literature in particular has to be approached diachronically (Frevel, 2011:11). In other words, this subject has been developed throughout history of the Biblical Hebrew in different contexts. For example, the patriarchal tradition portrayed intermarriage as a matter of morality; the Deuteronomistic writers approached it as a religious issue – apostasy; from early times of the Second Temple Judean Community to late Hellenization this topic had been addressed from the cultic point of view – priestly worship. So, each issue which involved intermarriage was treated according to its context.

Myers (1965:Lxi), in agreement with other modern scholars, pointed out that “The term separation is exclusively exilic and postexilic”. A reader of the Old Testament will discover that some of the patriarchs and most respected figures in the history of Israel married foreign women, and seemingly none of them was advised to separate from those wives. Instead, in some of the cases God reacted against those who criticized and opposed God’s exogamous leaders, as it was the case in Numbers 12 where God was angry with Miriam, because she was against Moses’ marriage to his Cushite wife. Yonina Dor summarizes it this way: “The complex picture portrayed by the present discussion shows that the attitude to relationship between Israel and Midian, which reached its peak in mixed marriages, changed from time to time and from case to case” (Dor, 2011:168). Second, one of the major characteristics of the biblical narratives is back projection (retroprojection). Israel Finkelstein puts it this way, “This is the point I have tried to emphasize ... that these texts should not be read as a sequential history, from ancient to later times, but in reverse – from the time of the writing back to the more remote periods of history” (Finkelstein and Mazar, 2007:19). A reading which is engaged from this angle tends to point to the fact that the further the time of writing distances itself from the time of the actual events, the less faithful and historical are the recordings. In other words, the text has the tendency of accommodating both real events and theological truths in order to conform to the contemporary situations of either the author or the reading community or even both. Claudia V. Camp, in her article on “Feminist – and Gender – Critical Perspectives on the Biblical Ideology of Intermarriage”, sides herself with Finkelstein when she says, “I suspect that the account of Ezra’s marriage reform should be understood as a retroprojection of a later day, connecting what became a big idea to one who became a legendary figure, rather than something we can assume as an historical point of departure” (Camp, 2011:305). Another important comment around this issue is given by McKenzie and Kaltner when they were analyzing critically the chronology of events in the book of Ezra. They observed that the letters attributed to kings Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes when dealing with the issue of temple rebuilding and the opposition seem to have been written later than the actual time of the reconstruction, given the fact that the two kings lived around 486-465 B.C. and 465-424 B.C. respectively and the temple was dedicated in 515 B.C. So, “The anachronism may also indicate that the book’s author/compiler wrote at a time substantially later than the events it recounts” (McKenzie and Kaltner, 2009:362). Both Finkelstein and Camp position themselves between the maximalist and minimalist points of view. They identify themselves with the centralist approach and argue that the Biblical text is

neither a scientifically and historically recorded document nor a fictional artistic work of the Second Temple writers. Instead, it is a theological text which reflects some historical events that took place far back in history. From these grounds, we can now move to the text.

The writings of Ezra-Nehemiah implicitly suggest that those who remained in the land after the Babylonian conquest and the returnees after the exile were without the Law and had acted unlawfully by mixing themselves with people from other nations through marriage. As a result, they had lost their identity. Now having been reminded by Ezra of what the Law said on this matter, the Israelites decided to divorce their foreign wives as a token of repentance and with the purpose of recovering their original religious identity, to be a people that exclusively belong to God, and to God alone (Pakkala, 2011:80-81). This understanding is to some extent supported by scholars who approach Ezra-Nehemiah with a source method. Two sources which are believed to have greatly influenced Ezra-Nehemiah's decision are 1 Kings 11 and Deuteronomy 7:3-4. 1 King 11 in particular states explicitly that the downfall of King Solomon's ruling status and his splendid kingdom was caused by his disobedience to God's order in Deuteronomy 7:3-4 which says "Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you". Solomon did exactly what the Lord prohibited the people of Israel to do; he loved the Moabite, Ammonite, Sidonian and Hittite women and took those wives to himself. These wives then also did exactly what the Lord had said they would do; they turned Solomon's heart to other gods. Consequently, "The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart has turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel..." (1 Kings 11:9), and the later generations endured the consequences. The kingdom was divided, and later it was given to foreign nations. That was the exilic experience. Being aware of all these, Ezra and Nehemiah did not want to go through the same experience over again when their countrymen were found guilty of having taken foreign wives, and therefore they applied the popular proverb which says, "It is better to prevent than to remediate". In this case the best solution was to divorce the foreign wives and avoid any other possibility of intermarriage rather than to wait until destruction came to the people of Israel.

It is equally suggested that purity ideology is an interpretation and application of the Law of Moses. Priestly (P) and Deuteronomistic (D) sources such as Leviticus 18:24-30, Deuteronomy 7:1-6 and 23:4-9 were interpreted and adjusted into the postexilic context

(Olyan, 2004:2). Interpreters of these texts took advantage of the reason behind each individual text and adjusted it in order to fulfill their present challenges and goals. The uniqueness of these texts shows that they did not welcome foreigners into the Judean community and pointed out the fact that the behavior and actions of non-Jewish people were an abomination. Therefore, to allow the presence of those men, women and children, even though some of them were Yahweh fearers and worshipers, was to expose the entire land to pollution which might lead to a complete extermination. A very interesting comment is given by Claudia V. Camp in her approach to the issue of intermarriage from a feminist point of view. Her indignation is demonstrated when she asks why women are the only problem in that community, and she goes on to suggest that the patrilineal mind-set of the Second Temple Judean Community seemed to be a family of only men. Camp goes further to say that the issue of purity and impurity in the Second Temple Judean Community had to do with blood. For this community the blood that is shed in circumcision meant covenant with YHWH, purity and life on the one hand, and the women's menstrual blood signified pollutions defilement and death on the other hand (Camp, 2011:308-309).

Furthermore, still from the approach mentioned above, Israel is a holy object and should not be associated with unholy items. In case such contact happened, it was classified as sacrilege and sin (Hayes, 1999:25). In this context, the Judean men, who were holy and dedicated items to God, were defiled by women of foreign origin. Therefore, they were a sacrilege and had to be ritually purified. The only way suggested in Ezra was to dissolve these intermarriages and send away the divorced wives and their children, with the aim of going back to a pure religious life. Besides the cultic identity, scholars also find an element of ethnic identity around this issue of intermarriage. All started with the concept of the 'holy seed'. In her article "An Ethnic Affair? Ezra's Intermarriage Crisis Against a Context of 'Self-Ascription' and 'Ascription of Others'", Katherine Southwood admits that the term 'seed' is ambiguous in a sense that it can mean agricultural seed, the beginning of an idea, descendant, a nation, or sperms (Southwood, 2011:57). Southwood argues that if one would approach it from its very simplest sense, an agricultural seed, for instance, one would agree on the fact that different species of seeds cannot be sown together. In case it is done, for any reason, the outcome will never be genuine. Christian Frevel (2011:242) did not use the simple connotation of the 'seed'. For him, the meaning of the 'seed' in the context of the postexilic community is man's genital discharge (sperms) which had two levels of defilement. One was

through sexual intercourse with a foreign partner, an intercourse which did not result in child bearing. This level of relationship meant the defilement of the “holy seed” which is found in the Jewish partner. The other one was to have sexual relationship with a foreign partner resulting in child bearing. This would mean first, the child was not ethnically genuine, and second, it was pollution to the entire ethnic group and would lead to its complete extinction. So, in order to maintain both blood and lineage genuineness either within the golah group or the priestly circle, intermarriage was something to be strictly avoided.

Another approach undertaken in this study is that of the historical method which highlights the fact that ancient Israel’s faith was based on the God of human history; God who favors above all family relationships and care. In this approach, scholars suggest that the concept of “foreign” should not be taken literally as a dividing word between descendants of Abraham and those who were not. In Ezra-Nehemiah’s context, this word stands for all those who did not go into exile, both Jews and non-Jews. While admitting that the whole scenario of intermarriage was a religious issue – the Jews had violated God’s will – scholars advocate that it had some socio-economic implications (Eskenazi, 1992:35). Land was a big issue in Jerusalem. The communitarian economic system, the ancestral property and the mutual help among the extended members of the family, all these were compromised, and to accommodate people who were from different social backgrounds would definitely worsen the situation. Wives and children of legitimate ancestral lineage would have very restricted property rights or even lose their rights for the sake of those of non-legitimacy. Besides, the land was the only source of income for family daily living and for taxation which, when not paid, one would be in danger of turning from a free person into a slave.

In conclusion, according to the writers/editors of Ezra-Nehemiah, the Cyrus edict was a fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham, and the beneficiaries of this promise were only those in exile. Having returned to their homeland, the nearly fifty thousand remnants were called to observe the Law of Moses about obedience and service to God. That would be their first typical identity. In the first place, this identity can be looked at from the priestly point of view. The people of Israel were to identify themselves with the Temple of Jerusalem and the Law of Moses. By so doing, they would be labeled as a chosen people and holy nation and therefore keep themselves away from people of other nations who obeyed and worshiped other gods. Instead, they married unholy and abominable women, and had an attitude of

disobedience to God. They had defiled themselves, had lost their identity as Yahweh's people and had become just like people of any other nation.

Moreover, the issue of intermarriage can be viewed from the ethnic identity approach. The concept of 'holy seed' has the tendency of cutting off any possibility in which blood mixture between Jews and non-Jews or priestly and non-priestly lineage occurs. The holy seed of the golah should not be defiled. Everyone who returned from the exile was holy to God and together constituted a holy nation. Therefore they should keep themselves away from sexual intercourse with a foreign partner to avoid either defiling the holy seed that was in them only or to have a non-genuine generation and be the end of their existence. This is of course different from the patriarchal context where intermarriage was a matter of morality and from the Deuteronomistic understanding in which it was a religious defense. Lastly, the attitude taken by the writers of the Second Temple literature can be approached from a socio-economic point of view. It is argued that the wives and children of their genuine heredity were at risk of losing their ancestral properties. Those women and their children who migrated in during those times of political tensions and took possession of the land and later intermarried with the first returnees seem to be the strong holders of the golah's ancestral properties, leaving the legitimate one landless. It was after the reading of the Law of God by Ezra and Nehemiah that the attitude among the remnant towards these three levels of identity (cultic, ethnic and socio-economic) was revealed and divorce in Ezra 10 was found to be the only way they could reverse the situation.

Against the broad background of studies that have been done on the destruction of Jerusalem, the exile and its effect, as well as on the postexilic community and its literature, we now come to the point of situating our study within this broad environment. The one important issue which has emerged from the above discussion is the different views on intermarriage reflected in some postexilic literature, in Ezra 10 in particular. The focus of our study will thus be on this issue and its reflection in the key text of Ezra 10. However, having arrived at this point, it is important that we formulate the problem statement and the respective research questions. That is what follows.

1.4. Problem Statement and Research Questions

Throughout the previous pages this study has sought to indicate that God does not reveal Himself in nothingness; He is the God of history. He is the God who works within and

through the “symbolic worlds” (Johnson, 1999:11), those real systems, such as religious experiences, political circumstances, social relationships, as well as the economic affairs, which make real life work. From a canonical point of view, God used Nebuchadnezzar to punish his people for not listening to his voice. He also used Persian rulers and both their human and material resources to re-establish the nation of Israel. It is in this context and with this hermeneutical assumption that the following problem will be investigated in this study:

What was the driving motivation of the abolition of intermarriages and what were its implications to ethnic identity in the Second Temple Judean Community according to Ezra 10?

In order to address the problem stated above, this study will attempt to answer the following five basic questions in the exegetical study of the appropriate source texts.

- a. What do biblical sources (other than Ezra 10), such as the Pentateuch, say about intermarriage and its implications to ethnic identity?
- b. What was the understanding of the Postexilic Judean community about intermarriage and its implications to ethnic identity?
- c. How was intermarriage related to sin to the point that the returnees were guilty?
- d. What was the status of women in the marriage contract during the Neo-Babylonian and postexilic periods?
- e. Was this action of abolition of intermarriage (divorce) a religious, an ethnic, a socio-economic issue or all three?

The first question will focus on the source text and serve as a key to unlock the other questions that follow. For the postexilic people, the Law of Moses functioned as the standard for any type of life, behavior or decision to be made. This is what Jean Louis Ska calls the laws of antiquity and conservation (Ska, 2006: 164 and 169), which means the older traditions are the most important and observation has to be done by both the individual and the community. The second question will deal with the principles of interpretation and reinterpretation of the Law. The postexilic people would mostly be influenced by the Law of Moses in their understanding and interpretation of the issue of intermarriage, then its respective abolition. The third question will be the practical application of the first two questions – the result of what the Law says and its interpretation. It will also highlight the fact

that the writings of ancient Israel should not be viewed as simply historical or philosophical records, but primarily as religious writings. Lastly, the fourth and fifth questions will approach this study from a historical perspective with an awareness of the symbolic worlds mentioned above. The Law, its interpretation and application, happened within socio-economic, religious and political systems.

1.5. Hypothesis

Though there are various interpretations around the issue of intermarriage and their dismissal in Ezra 10, as indicated above, the researcher sides with A. Philip Brown who argues that the leading motive behind this episode was idolatry, when he said it correctly, “Perhaps the most obvious implication of the crisis is the supreme importance of holiness” (Brown, 2009:176). It is therefore from this approach that the presupposition of the present study is that the dismissal of intermarriages in Ezra 10, whether a historical or etiological account, should not be viewed as an end in itself, rather it was one of the means taken by Ezra’s Second Temple intended audience to institute a monotheistic and holy religion which later came to be known as Judaism, the backbone of Christianity.

1.6. Methodology

One of the simplest definitions of the Bible is “God’s word to humankind”. It is God’s revelation and humankind’s response. In the whole process of this revelation there are core elements such as religion, history, anthropology and language to mention only four that make the object of revelation meaningful to the recipient. For that reason, recent studies in the field of Biblical Hermeneutics have come up with the method of an “Integrated Approach” (Tate, 2009:5) which advocates the spirit of dialogue with all the core elements mentioned above. The understanding behind this approach is that there is no method of biblical interpretation which is perfect and able to answer all the questions that a biblical text might need in order to reveal its meaning. The following gives a short summary of the integrated approach that will be employed in this study.

- Literary analysis – the focus will initially be on the text itself, in its final form. Special attention will be paid to the kind of words and sentences and the way they are used, and the different genres found in the text.

- Source and text analyses – these will be two other approaches used in this study in which the research will attempt to go beyond the final form of the text. While the first will examine the changes that the text might have experienced through the redaction and editorial work of the scribes up to its final form, the second will consider the original sources that lie behind the text.
- Literary-contextual analysis – the text will be considered in the literary context of both the Ezra-Nehemiah writings and the Pentateuch. In other words, it will be studied how this issue of intermarriage and divorce fits into Ezra-Nehemiah's book in particular and into the Law of Moses in general.
- Historical analysis – this will involve the socio-economic, religious and political structures of the postexilic world in an attempt to understand why the decision in Ezra 10 was made and its possible implications. It will also be used in this study to open the discussion of how and for what reason these foreign women that are reported in Ezra 10 and people like Tobiah and Sanballat in Nehemiah 13 came to be residents of the land for decades to the point of winning a strong trust among the remnant.
- In addition to the above, there will be a brief reflection on the reception of Ezra-Nehemiah's writings in modern-day communities. This is due to the fact that, like many other Hebrew Bible texts, Ezra-Nehemiah's writings explicitly give the impression that the receiving community was exclusively patriarchal and male-dominated. This aspect of the text in Ezra 10 is also the reason why this text had been used in various contexts to oppress foreigners and females. Claudia Camp (2011:304), for example, emphasizes in her study of the intermarriage texts that feminist- and gender-critical perspectives are valuable for unpacking the ideologies that hide behind these texts. Our study will, however, not be a feminist- or gender-critical study as such. Although these approaches are valid and valuable for the study of Ezra 10, the choice of methods is co-determined by the more limited aim as set out in the introduction above. The researcher furthermore will remain sensitive for the context in which his study will be received, where both Christian young men and women are prevented from marrying outside their tribal circles and church denominations, and polygamous men are not allowed to investigate their faith in Jesus Christ before they divorce other wife/wives.

The above-mentioned methodological perspectives will, however, not be employed in a linear, recipe-like manner. They will rather form the scientific mechanisms which will feed into the overall argument of the thesis. The present work will be developed in a spiral-like fashion starting with the narrow focus on a literary analysis of the final form of the text, continuing to the wider context of Ezra-Nehemiah's writings, and from there to even wider literary contexts in other parts of the Old Testament, ending with the widest socio-historical contexts. In the analysis of each of these contexts, the above-mentioned scientific methodological perspectives will be utilized to get insight into the data. The integrated approach on which it will be based therefore integrates these methods into the spiral argument, from the narrowest to the widest context. Having given this introduction, now we move on to chapter two to address the literary analysis of the final form of the text in question.

Chapter 2

Literary Analysis

2.1. Introduction

It is mentioned in the previous chapter that the Bible is one of the means through which God and humankind have been in mutual interaction. In this interaction, God revealed Himself through real systems, and one of those systems is language. In other words, W. Randolph Tate said, “While the Bible may be part of God’s revelation and self-disclosure to humanity, it is a revelation expressed in human language” (2008:89). While one of the simplest definitions of language would be the method of human communication, it is important to indicate that the function of language is more than expressing sentiments, thoughts, and perceptions; it plays a key role in the social identity of a particular group of people and, therefore, it varies from one particular ethnic group to another, from one generation to another (it is dynamic), one geographical area to another, and from one religion to another. Moreover, though the original form of this interaction between God and humanity was in oral tradition, its canonical form falls under the category of *literae*, which means it is a written work of art and, therefore, “We need a literary consciousness in our biblical interpretation, an awareness of the way in which the resources of language can be deployed to achieve a variety of ‘meaning effects’” (Jonker and Lawrie, 2006:237). Now as readers of this literature (the written work), we are faced mainly with two challenges in our attempt to understand and be part of it. Both challenges are in relation to the language itself: one is the dynamic element, and the other is the literature as a work of art. When these two elements are taken into consideration, the reader of the Bible reaches a point where he/she understands the importance of literary analysis – “the careful examination of how an author’s compositional method communicates his intended message” (Brown, 2009:11). This is the focus of the present chapter, and special attention will be limited to specific genres, key words/terms found in the text. However, for the benefit of its content, it would be appropriate to consider at least two of the major literary features of any biblical text, namely chronology and authenticity of the sources.

2.2. Chronology and Authenticity

Chronology and authenticity of the sources are some of the leading concerns among modern literary scholars. With regard to chronology, it is argued that there is a huge gap as far as the order of the resources in Ezra's writings is concerned. A. Philip Brown, for instance, stated: "Since dates are characteristic of historical narrative, and 'for narrative to make sense as narrative, it has to make chronological sense,' the reader has a double sense that Ezra's narratives should unfold in just the sequence that things happened. But it does not" (Brown, 2009:15-16). The first concern in this regard is how Ezra 3:1-2 and 8-10 can be reconciled with 5:16. In chapter 3 the author states that soon after the returnees were settled in their towns during the Cyrus mandate, Jeshua, his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel and his associates began to build the altar of the Lord, God of Israel (3:1-2). The following verses 3 and 4 seem to give an impression that, though with some opposition from the peoples of the lands, Jeshua and his team had finished building the altar, and the sacrificial worship had been re-established, as it reads: "Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed the morning and evening sacrifices" (v.3). Furthermore, verses 8-12 indicate that the foundation of the temple had been completed and, therefore, there was great joy among the returnees. However, chapter 5:16 depicts the time of Darius I, and the author gives a new piece of information, which sounds like it is now that the foundation of the temple is being laid down not by Jeshua and Zerubbabel, but by a different figure – Sheshbazzar, the appointee of Cyrus to the governing office in the province of Judah.

The second concern is about the contextual mismatch in chapter 4:7-23. Blane W. Conklin (2001:84) argues that the letter written by Rehum the commanding officer and Shimshai the secretary was addressed to Artaxerxes I and yet its historical context seemed to be the time of Darius I (v.24), who lived about fifty years earlier than the supposed addressee. If the author had considered the chronological order between these two emperors, he then would have meant Darius II. But even if the author referred to the latter, the order would be complicated when coming to chapter 5 where he involves prophets Haggai and Zechariah who are portrayed to have lived during the reign of Darius I. Scholars, then, have concluded that "... both the chronology and the content of the letter are out of context in Ezra 1-6" (Dozeman, 2003:460). This is where literary questions arise and, though there are no definite answers to such questions, scholars have come up with at least two hypotheses. First, like other Old Testament writings, the book of Ezra is a collection of different sources, such as imperial

correspondences, royal and temple records, prayers, lists of people, inventories, genealogies, and so on. Yonina Dor, in her article on ‘The Composition of the Episode of the Foreign Women in Ezra 9-10’ indicated that this plot/division is comprised of three different sources and each source seems to have a different author from different periods of time. She went on to conclude that, “I claim that the composition of Ezra 9-10 is based upon three separate sources concerning the separation from ‘foreign women’ and ‘the peoples of the land’ which were combined in two stages” (Dor, 2003:26). This is to say that despite the different genres found in the text, there are various materials from different sources which seem to be unrelated to each other within the text. The author¹ pulled out different information from different sources and brought them together in order to fulfill his purpose. It is from this approach that scholars argue that the editor was somehow ignorant of the chronological order of the different sources he used in his composition of this book, as Williamson (1986:43) said it correctly, “The narrator was not quite clear of the chronological order of his sources”. The second hypothesis is that the author was not interested in chronological order of the events. Again this will not be a surprise to an Old Testament student. This study has mentioned in the previous chapter the principle of retroprojection of the biblical texts and their adjustment into the contemporary situations of the writers or composers. In this case, chronological order became less important to the authors. So it is with the author of the book of Ezra. He was not concerned about when such events took place. Instead he was more influenced by the purpose he wanted to achieve (Conklin, 2001:84).

With regard to the authenticity of the sources which comprise the book of Ezra, there are three different schools of thought. One advocates a complete authenticity; another school defends the idea that the sources were created by the author himself; and the third believes that the sources are genuine but expanded upon by the editors. In his article ‘Aramaic Documents in Ezra Revised’, Williamson (2008) describes his progressive judgment on this issue. He stated that twenty-five years prior the publication of his current article, he defended that the Aramaic documents that were included in the writings of Ezra were legitimate, as it was the consensus among main stream scholarship. Williamson moves on to say scholars, such as Wright and Pakkala, undertook this topic from the skeptical point of view, rejecting any possibility that such scripts could be genuine. In fact, Pakkala (2004:46-48), after having

¹ The term author is implied in this study to refer to the editor/composer of Ezra’s writings.

outlined six reasons² that should be considered on this matter, stated: “Although one may raise objections to some of the presented arguments, the cumulative evidence suggests that Ezra 7:11a, 12-15, 16b, 19-22 is not an authentic letter of the Achaemenid administration. It was written for the book of Ezra and it is comprehensible only in its current context after themes introduced in Ezra 1-6.” The third position is the school of the centrists with whom Williamson has identified himself, in his recent biblical understanding. In this actual article, he asserted that it is possible that some Jewish scribes had given input into some of the original scripts, and it is true that the text as a whole has gone through serious editing activities. However, “it is not the data that have changed for the most part but rather the wider frame within which those data are interpreted” (Williamson, 2008:54). Another group of scholars who stand at the centre together with Williamson and many others are William Sanford Lasor, David Allan Hubbard and Frederic W. Bush. In their literary analysis of the imperial documents and letters, they suggested that most of all these documents were originally written in Aramaic and later were adapted to the situation of the returnees. Then they concluded, “These ultimately must have come from the Persian state archives” (Lasor, Hubbard and Bush, 2003:557).

In summary, the book of Ezra is composed of different sources, and in its composition the author did not pay attention to the chronological order of his sources. The author’s ultimate goal was to fulfill his purpose, which was basically to describe in a written form the fulfillment of the words of the prophet of Yahweh. It was Yahweh’s plan and He, not the emperor, fulfilled it. In terms of authenticity of the different sources which comprise the book of Ezra, there are three different schools of thought: maximalists that defend absolute legitimacy of the sources; the minimalist school which believes that the editor of the book created his own actors and put the words in their mouth; lastly, the school of the centre which advocates the possibility that those sources were genuine but adopted to the Jewish contemporary situation without removing the facts.

2.3. Narrative Analysis of Ezra

Linguists and biblical scholars defend that a good knowledge of genre functions and principles is one of the primary skills for a better understanding of a given piece of literature.

² See Pakkala (2004:47-48) for full discussion.

For a reader to understand the intended meaning of any given text, he/she has to know the form/genre of that particular text, whether it is a command, a song, a letter, a prophetic oracle, or simply a declaration/narrative. For instance, for one to be able to understand the message of a poem first of all he/she has to be able to recognize that the text is a poem then try to read it as a poem, and not as if it were a letter or a narrative, therefore, identifying the general characteristics of a poetic literature. Moreover, it is true that not every literature in every culture portrays true stories³. There are literary materials that are historically and/or scientifically justified, but there are also those which are just stories or fiction and yet they have a message to communicate. This is undisputable even within the biblical literature. An Old Testament student will agree with the fact that it is unrealistic and sometimes dangerous⁴ for our Christian faith to categorize every episode recorded in the Hebrew Bible as a true story. Steven L. McKenzie, in addressing the book of Jonah, mentioned a movie entitled “Galaxy Quest”, a great science fiction movie, to illustrate this point. The Thurman culture accepted the TV show “Galaxy Quest” as being real and based their whole culture on this fiction. McKenzie’s argument is that if one reads scientific fiction as if it were a real story or a thoroughly researched scientific documentary and try to implement it in real life, it would cause serious damage and disgrace. He then concluded that “Misconstruing the genre of a piece of literature, therefore, can be disastrous” (McKenzie, 2005:13-14). It is, therefore, through the understanding of genre that one can easily recognize whether the story is true, or it is simply fiction and then to be able to understand its intended meaning.

In oral communication where the author/narrator commonly gives his/her utterances in the presence of an audience, whether through visual or audible means, it is easy to recognize whether he/she is uttering a command or is simply giving information, reciting a poem or singing a song, telling a fiction or a true story, celebrating with great joy or mourning with deep sadness. However, in written literature the relationship between the author and the reader is totally different, more so with regards to biblical literature. The author is far away from the reader and, therefore, it is not easy to recognize the features mentioned above. This

³ The term ‘stories’ in this thesis is used in light of the three different approaches to the biblical text in relation to its historicity: maximalist, minimalist, and centrist. See Finkelstein (2007:9) for a full discussion.

⁴ McKenzie (1997:1) commented that the danger to our Christian faith in this context does not mean that if one does not understand the meaning of the biblical faith, he/she will lose faith or miss eternal life, but one may have blind faith.

point is best described by Louis C. Jonker and Douglas Lawrie (2006:236-237) when they identified four different dimensions of this matter. The first dimension is about people. The biblical texts were first collected, written, composed and edited by different authors. Besides the fact that their historical contexts were different from that of the modern reader, it is also true that individual authors/editors of different biblical texts and sometimes of the same text had distinct historical settings. The second dimension is time. A 21st century reader of the biblical literature has to be aware of the fact that these texts were written down about 2500 years ago, probably after having gone through the same period of time in an oral transmission. Luke Timothy Johnson, a New Testament scholar, came up with a very concrete and helpful note when he said, “For the moment, I merely note that the NT writings must be read within their first century Mediterranean setting, and in particular within the matrix of the first-century Judaism” (1999:5). This is the same with the Old Testament texts; they must be read in light of their own time and cultural context. In this case, the writings of Ezra have to be read in the context of late Persian and early Hellenistic periods. The third dimension is language. It has been mentioned above that language varies from culture to culture, from place to place, and from time to time. Language is a dynamic social domain; it is one of the socio-anthropological domains which determines how a particular language group thinks and expresses ideas and concepts. So, it is true that ancient pre-exilic Hebrew people expressed their ideas and concepts differently from the ancient Hellenistic Hebrew community. The same can be said with regards to the Persian Second Temple Judean community, the early Christian community, the Church Reformation, the children of the Renaissance, and modern societies. The last dimension is religion. An Old Testament student will not doubt that the Hebrew Bible is about religion. In fact, it has been repeatedly mentioned that the Bible is an interaction between God and humankind. It is God’s revelation and humankind’s response. Johnson put it this way “The NT writings approach us as witnesses to and interpretation of specifically religious claims having to do with the experience of God as mediated through Jesus” (1999:6). Johnson is exactly in accord with Brueggemann’s advocacy of the Old Testament as ancient Israel’s testimony about God. He said, “Thus our proper subject is speech about God... in addition to Israel’s speech about God, much in the Old Testament is spoken by God to Israel” (Brueggemann, 1997:117). It is, therefore, the responsibility and the privilege of the actual reader to know that the Old Testament text in his/her hand was written in ancient times, by and to ancient people, in ancient languages to address their religious issues. If all these dimensions are not taken into

account, the result might possibly be what McKenzie has anticipated when he said, “The potential for confusion increases when a reader, any reader, confronts literature from an entirely different culture and time” (2005:14). In other words, to approach a biblical text without considering these dimensions can be misleading and can lead to serious misunderstanding.

W. Randolph Tate (2008:102) argues that, besides the fiction and non-fiction types of literature which have been pointed out by McKenzie, there are basically two types of genres in the Hebrew Bible, namely narrative and poetry. However, there is a third – prophecy, which tends to accommodate the two major ones. With regard to the book of Ezra, A. Philip Brown stated that narrative is the most predominant genre in Ezra’s writings, when he said, “Despite the diversity of its compositional elements, the book of Ezra fits within the narrative genre” (2009:12). In fact, a close look at Ezra’s writings will prove that the first plot/division, which will be the focus in the next paragraphs, is predominantly of narrative literature with its subgenres such as imperial documents, lists of people, inventories, genealogies and letters.

2.3.1. The First Division/Plot (Ezra 1-6)

Modern scholars are in agreement that the book of Ezra has two major divisions/plots. The first division accommodates the first six chapters (1-6), and the second comprises the last four chapters (7-10). The Wycliffe Bible Commentary identifies the first plot with the first two years of Cyrus and the first six years of Darius I and the second division calls “The records of the events during the first part of the reign of Artaxerxes I” (Pfeiffer, 1966:423); the Africa Bible Commentary finds it better to name the first division “The reconstruction of the Temple of Jerusalem under Zerubbabel” and the second “The reconstruction of the Jewish community under Ezra” (Weanzana, 2006:531); and IVP Women’s Bible Commentary calls the first division/plot “The first return of the Jews” and the second plot “The second return of the Jews” (Kroeger and Evans, 2002:248). This way of classifying the writing of Ezra in two plots is also held by individual scholars such as A. Philip Brown (2009) who argues that the second division is predominately narrating the episode of the second return of the exiles under the leadership of Ezra and comprises the last four chapters. He then presents two ways of analyzing them. One is known as the Aristotelian⁵ model which identifies the incidents

⁵ The Aristotelian plot referred mainly to the “ordered arrangements of the incidents in which there is beginning,

within the division, and the other one is called the Pyramidal⁶ model which focuses on the moments of conflict and problem solving, as the scene keeps on developing. The two models will be represented in this study.

According to this approach, the first episode is comprised of the return of the first exiles which include the Cyrus edict, the inventory of the temple vessels and other utensils which were carried by Nebuchadnezzar when he destroyed the Temple of Jerusalem and took the people captive and the list of the families of the returnees and their settlement in their respective towns (chapters 1-2). This is followed by the middle of the plot which includes the rebuilding of the temple and the opposition from the people known as the peoples of the lands or enemies (chapters 3-4). Lastly is the end of the plot which takes the last two chapters (5-6), and it includes the intervention of both imperial authority and the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the resuming of the construction of the temple, and its completion and dedication.

This plot opens with one of the most important extra-canonical and canonical documents in history of the Second Temple Jewish community – the so-called Cyrus edict (1:2-4). Without getting into its theological implications, it is important to point out at least two aspects. First, this document has been understood and interpreted as a clear proof that the historical turning point in the life of the exiles was an absolute divine plan of God of Israel. In one way or another, Ezra is cancelling any possibility that one would assume that the beginning of the new era for the exiles was a part of the Persian emperors' political policy and therefore give some credit to Cyrus and his successors. H.G.M. Williamson said it correctly that the ultimate purpose of the writer/editor of the book of Ezra was to prove to the public as well as to inform the future generations that “This is not the king, but God” (1986:9). From the literary point of view it is believed that this edict was also presented in an oral form. This makes sense in a society where the majority of the people were illiterate. Both the written and oral forms go hand in hand. It is, therefore, suggested by scholars, especially African academics who are still children of this type of society, that after Cyrus promulgated this edict, his scribes put it in a written form, and his heralds went to the Jewish settlements and announced it orally (Weanzana, 2006:533). In fact, VanderKam (2001:2) put it as follows, “According to

middle and end” (Brown, 2009:66-68).

⁶ The Pyramidal model is the structuring of the division in terms of “conflict, development and resolution”. (Brown, 2009:70).

the biblical sources, King Cyrus ‘sent a herald throughout his kingdom and also declared in a written edict’ (2 Chron. 36:22; Ezra 1:1).” The second aspect about Cyrus edict has been interpreted as a fulfillment of the word spoken decades ago by the prophets. In the context of ancient Mesopotamian society where the prophetic office had become a matter of professional career and, sometimes, a source of economic income, it was profoundly important to indicate that Jeremiah was a true prophet. The God of the whole universe, who is in control of time and its circumstances, had spoken through His true prophet, and now He is fulfilling His words.

Before the list of the family heads of those who responded to the Cyrus edict and went back to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the writer presents an inventory of the Temple articles that had been carried to Babylon along with the first group of the returnees. It is substantiated that one of the major duties of the scribes was to take and keep records of the great royal achievements such as war conquests and constructions (palaces, temples, etc.). It is from this approach that Weanzana (2006:534) stated, “It seems like this list was prepared long time ago by the scribe, before or just after the devastation”. In other words, a scribe or a group of scribes, among those taken to the exile, might have prepared and kept it in a safe place until the time it was collected and published in the book of Ezra. This is again a proof that Ezra’s book is a collection of different materials to make the author’s point.

Following the inventory of the temple vessels and other utensils is the list of heads of families, priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers and temple servants. There are various theories about this list. Two of them were addressed in the previous chapter⁷. One theory suggests that the list was for political purposes and the other one supports that it was for group identity; who was and who was not a member of the group of the returnees. In other words, only those on the list were to be considered the true heirs of the land. The other two theories are highlighted by Hayyim Angel (2007). The first one is related to the ruling entity for the new community. While in the pre-exilic community the king was the central figure of authority, in the new community the authority was held by the people themselves. Becking stated it correctly, “Ezra and Nehemiah shift the focus from leaders and heroic figures to the participating community” (2011:13). The implication of this shift will reflect the process of

⁷ See chapter one for a full discussion.

reconstruction of the city and the definition of ownership of the Temple of Jerusalem. In the pre-exilic community the king was the one responsible for building and running the temple. In the new community, however, the temple is built and run by the people, as Angel puts it “the Torah and the Book of Kings highlight the physical structure of the sanctuaries, and the heroes who built them. Now in Ezra-Nehemiah the people are at the centre of the activity” (2007:145). So, the list had the purpose of ensuring that the temple will be built not by individual figures but by the people – only those whose family names are on the list; a practical transfer of the power from individual kings to the masses. In other words, “The royal individual is replaced by the whole community” (Clauss, 2011:115).

The middle of the plot (chapters 3-4) starts with a narrative about the construction of the altar and the foundation of the temple. In addition to the narrative genre, this scene accommodates two letters. One is from the peoples of the lands, who were refused to be part of the rebuilding of the temple and now are accusing the returnees of being a group of rebels, building a rebellious city (4:11-16). This spirit of exclusivism seems to start in chapter 2 with the compilation of the list of the returnees, which implicitly meant to be the owners and the only ones who would do the reconstruction of the temple. The accusers used historical evidences to support their argument. Judah had been known as a kingdom of rebellious kings. This study can identify only three incidents of rebellion recorded in the canonical text. One is found in 2 Kings 24:1 which reads, “During Johoiakim’s reign, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded the land, and Johoiakim became his vassal for three years. But then he changed his mind and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar”. The other two rebellious episodes are recorded in 2 Kings 25:1, 25-26 “Now Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon”, and “In the seventh month, however, Ishmael son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, who was of royal blood, came with ten men and assassinated Gedaliah and also the men of Judah and the Babylonians who were with him at Mizpah. At this, all the people from the least to the greatest, together with the army officers, fled to Egypt for fear of the Babylonians”. This shows that Jerusalem was known to be a rebellious city and its reconstruction could also mean to the outsiders the revitalization of the rebellious attitude. To make things worse, it is when the same returnees, who were deported into exile because of rebelling against the ruling powers, refused to socialize with those who had remained in the land. The emperor responds through the same type of genre – a letter, to confirm that records about incidents of rebellion of Judah were found in the book of the annals of the king of Babylonia. The returnees were

found guilty and therefore ordered to stop the reconstruction project. That marks the end of the second episode, technically known as the middle of the first division/plot.

Lastly, it is the end of this plot which starts with the intervention of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah in chapter 5. The author does not give any detail of what these two prophets said. He only stated that the two prophets prophesized to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem. This will not be a surprise to any reader of literature to know that most of the time authors have freedom to choose what they want to write and what they want to leave out. This might be the case here with the author of Ezra. When we consult the books of these prophets, however, we come to understand that one of the major themes in their messages was that people of Israel should give priority to their spiritual matters – God first, by finishing the reconstruction of the temple. In fact, these are the words of Zechariah, "... This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Return to me', declares the Lord Almighty, 'and I will return to you,' says the Lord Almighty" (Zec. 1:3). Haggai, on the other hand, said: "... These people say, 'the time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built'. Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: 'Is it a time for yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?'" (Hagg.1:2-3). Considering the content of the messages of these two prophets, Pieter A. Verhoef noted, "Haggai's single objective was to encourage the leaders and the people to complete an unfinished task, the rebuilding of the temple" (1987:43). In agreement with Verhoef's comment, Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans stated, "The issue was not only the opposition, but they had not put God first" (1986:250). Verhoef, Kroeger and Evans might be correct in their judgment, because soon after the intervention of the prophets, the author of Ezra confirmed that the work had successfully resumed (5:2).

The last part of this episode is a short narrative about a face-to-face confrontation between the leaders of the returnees and the opposition party, followed by a letter from the leaders of the opposition to the Emperor Darius, and finally a decree from the emperor that gives the returnees complete authorization to continue and finish the rebuilding of the temple. It is quite interesting to note how the original confrontation between the two groups (5:3-5) is expanded in the letter that was sent to Darius (5:8-18). Again, the author exercises his freedom of choosing what he wants to include or to exclude in his writings, without removing the original data.

Of more importance is the element of rhetoric implied in this plot. It is the opponents (the enemies) who speak to the emperor in a very positive and persuasive manner on behalf of the returnees, as it reads: “This is the answer they gave us: ‘We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth...’ (v.11); “However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this house of God. He even removed from the temple of Babylon the gold and silver articles of the house of God which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem...” (vv.13-14); “Now if it pleases the king, let a search be made in the royal archives of Babylon to see if King Cyrus did in fact issue a decree to rebuild this house of God in Jerusalem...” (v.17). Just like other writings of the Bible, the entire book of Ezra is full of rhetorical speeches. Gordon F. Davies (1999) identified at least three of them in the book of Ezra. One he calls the ‘rhetorical situation’ which attempts to convince the audience how important the temple is not only for the returnees but also for the entire Persian Empire. The other one is the ‘rhetorical strategies’ which tends to show that all which is happening in the history of the returnees is God’s plan being fulfilled through imperial authorities. The third are the rhetorical devices which emphasize the fact that what seems to be harsh in the eyes of either the people of Israel or the peoples of the lands is an application of God’s will and justice. In short, the ultimate aim of the author is to persuade and convince his audience and take them to his side.

Following is a decree issued by Darius in chapter 6, which sounds more elaborate and authoritative than that of Cyrus. This decree includes the measurements of the temple – “It is to be ninety feet high and ninety feet wide” (v. 3); a strong restriction to the governors of Trans-Euphrates not to interfere with the building of the temple (v.7); a full responsibility given to the royal treasury to pay off all the expenses for the construction of the temple (vv.8-9); and full authority given to Ezra to implement a capital penalty for anyone who would dare to change or disobey the imperial decree (v.11). Again, there is a lot of rhetoric involved in this episode. The author is intentionally aiming to convince his audience that God has a plan for the exiles, and the emperor is an instrument for the fulfillment of that plan.

Finally, there is the narrative about the completion and dedication of the temple, and the celebration of the Passover festival in 6:13-22. As it was the author’s focal point in chapters 1 and 2, even here the attention goes to the golah people. The picture of the shift from individual kings to the community, as has been indicated above in reference to Angel’s analysis of the list in Ezra 2, is clearly projected in these narratives. When the rebuilding of

the temple is resumed, the reference goes to the elders of the Jews as being the ones who continued and finished; for the dedication of the temple, the author implied the term “people of Israel” which gives reference to the introductory statement to the list of the people in chapter 2:2b “The list of the men of the people of Israel”. For him these people are “priests, Levites and the rest of the exiles” (6:16); lastly, when coming to the celebration of the Passover, the author gives an impression that it was only for the golah and those who had separated themselves from the abomination of the peoples of the land.

2.3.2. The Second Division/Plot (Ezra 7-10)

The second division/plot includes the last four chapters and is technically called Ezra’s memoirs. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines the term memoirs as “an autobiography or written account of one’s memory of certain events or people”. This is the case with the last four chapters of Ezra’s writings. Like the first plot, these memoirs are also comprised of collected sources, such as narratives, letters, lists, prayer and confessions. The beginning of the plot opens with the commissioning of Ezra by Artaxerxes to go to Jerusalem, in chapters 7-8. This is followed by the middle of the plot in chapter 9, which culminates with what Christopher B. Hays (2006:65) calls “crux of the narrative of the issue of intermarriage” or “tension”⁸, according to Walsh (2009:14) which ends with Ezra’s prayer. The end of the plot is the overcoming of the crux and its respective solution in chapter 10 which includes the public confession, the dismissal of intermarriages and the list of those who were guilty of such intermarriages. All these divisions and subdivisions represent different genres, a topic to which we are now turning. However, before moving on to this point, it is profoundly important to look at two of the key features of this second plot – the change of perspective from third to first person and the one-sided point of view of the author.

It is mentioned in the previous paragraph that these last four chapters are called Ezra’s memoirs, which means an autobiography or written account, in this case, of Ezra’s memories of certain events or people. Being an autobiography or account of memories, a reader of these accounts would expect to have them written from the first person perspective. Instead, the case here seems to be quite different. Right at the beginning of the plot, the reader is confronted with a narrative from a third person perspective, except two verses (7:27-28),

⁸ The term ‘tension’ is used in the Pyramidal model to mean middle of the plot.

which are in the first person. The entire chapter 10 is in third person narrative without one single word from Ezra, in the first person perspective. What Ezra seems to know and take full responsibility for is the letter from Artaxerxes which after having been received he gave a very short prayer of thanksgiving to God for touching the heart of the king and his officials; he also seems to know the entire content of chapter 8 (the list of those who went up to Jerusalem with him, the whole journey and the deliverance of the articles they brought from Babylon), as well as the content of chapter 9 (the identification of the problem among the returnees and his prayer for the problem). Then chapter 10 which describes the way in which the problem was solved and how the stability in the community was put in place comes from a different perspective – third person. Why such changes of perspective?

Brown (2009) addressed this issue at significant length and started by observing that the shift from third to first person perspective in Ezra's writings seems to be one of the features that makes this book unique when one considers the fact that most of the biblical narratives are mainly from the third person perspective. He continues to state two rationales held among biblical scholars to help explain this phenomenon. First, some source and literary critical scholars argue that this change of perspective is a result of editorial work, as they explicitly stated, "From the perspective of literary criticism, Ezra 7-8 has proven to be particularly difficult, but it is evident that both chapters have been heavily edited" (Pakkala, 2004:22). This perspective defends that the common norm found in biblical narratives is the third person perspective and, therefore, the entire original text in Ezra 7-10 was in the third person. At a later stage someone inserted the first person perspective. In other words, chapters 7:27-28 and 8-9 are a result of later editions. Other scholars approach this topic differently, arguing that the author was consciously aware of what he was doing and decided to structure the narratives the way they appear for the sake of literary dynamics. Brown (2009:105-108) outlines at least three of them. First is that the reader is able to capture the narrator's feeling and his point of view about the story. In this case, the reader is able to see how grateful Ezra was in 7:27-28 after receiving the letter of authorization from the king. Second, first person perspective gives the reader a significant degree of certainty that he/she is getting accurate information without any possible omission or addition of data. This is the case with chapters 8 and 9 the reader feels like he/she is a part of the scenario and is close to the narrator. Gordon F. Davies put it this way, "Ezra deepens our acquaintance with him by playing between narration in the first person and the third" (1999:60-61). The third literary dynamic

shows clearly that the main actor is not alone. He works with others as a team, and every member of the team plays a role. This is clearly seen throughout this plot. To prove this point, right from the beginning Ezra is described as a man who had both divine and imperial authority and approval. However, as the story rolls on, he shares his authority and responsibility with other members of his team, and in the end it is not just one person, in this case Ezra, making decisions but the entire team. The third approach to this topic is from a compositional point of view. This approach is based on the principle of source collection and sustains that Ezra 9-10 is a composition of three different sources 9:6-15; 10:2-6; and 10:7-44, and each source has its different author. Aside from the fact that the two chapters differ in terms of mood: the former being focused on prayer (repentance and confession) and the latter on brevity and decision making, it is also observed that “the most distinctive difference between these two chapters is found in their grammatical person of the speaker. The whole chapter 9 is composed in the first person, whereas chapter 10 is in the third person” (Dor, 2003:27).

In regards to the one-sided point of view, Christopher B. Hays (2008) have suggested that there were two reasons why the author sounds monologist. According to Hays, though this theory has been used basically for multiple voices, it can also be applied in situations where other voices seem to be ignored, and it is only one voice that is heard. First, he argues that when this theory is applied to Ezra 7-10, it does not only stimulate the literary complexity of the text, but it also discloses the ethical values that are incorporated in the text. The author of Ezra was confronted by two forces: “centripetal and centrifugal forces”⁹. These two forces moved in different directions and divided the people into two different groups. The author used the centripetal force to speak in favor of those he wanted to bring in and at the same time sent others away by silencing them through the centrifugal force. By doing so, he had to ignore the state of guilt he would have found by compromising the general ethical principles for the sake of his ideology – exclusivism. In fact, Hays said, “To say that they, *those women who were sent away*, [emphasis mine] have no voice does not put it strongly enough: in fact, they are not real characters at all. They are nameless and unlike their husbands, we see neither their reaction nor their departure” (Hays, 2008:68). In other words, it is not a matter of letting them be a part of the group and yet without voice. Instead, they were once in the

⁹ A full discussion on these two terms can be found in Hays (2008:62).

past a people, but now they no longer exist. Hays concluded that whether it was done intentionally or not, the point is that this type of rhetoric is a strong tool that the author used to avoid any kind of conflict among many voices which would discredit or challenge his ideology of exclusivism.

The second reason is what Walter Brueggemann (1997) calls testimony and counter testimony. The testimony that Israel gives about God had to be brought to the court for trial; some other voices such as the wisdom writings and some of the prophetic sayings are considered as a counter testimony to question the testimony of God's faithfulness and his steadfast love. These voices are not necessarily there to repudiate the testimony presented by the witness. Instead, they are there either to stimulate the witness, clarify his/her arguments or to present the other side of the truth which the witness had intentionally or unintentionally left out. According to Hays, the testimony in Ezra's writings did not have much of an opportunity to be taken to court for a trial. Why? "The interim between its events and its canonization is a relatively small one in comparison to other texts in the Hebrew Bible; probably less than two hundred years" (Hays, 2008:79). While other testimonies took about millennia or more in their oral tradition plus more than half millennia in their written form, Ezra's witness was stated almost at the end of the trial time, and there was no time left to be questioned or supported by other voices. However, modern scholars argue that Ezra-Nehemiah's ideology was not the only testimony in the post-exilic period; there were other voices, which seemed to have the spirit of inclusivism in their writings (Cezula, 2013). In fact Matthews and Mayer (1997:233) are in accordance with Cezula, when they observed that the period of Ezra-Nehemiah has been traditionally known as 'the end of an era', which did not necessarily mean Ezra-Nehemiah's writings were the only and last ones. There were other literary works that were compiled around that time; writings such as Chronicles, Trito Isaiah, Jonah, Ruth, Ester, Daniel and some Deuterocanonical books.

The first scene of the present plot covers the first two chapters (7-8) and is in the third person perspective. The narrator starts with an open introductory statement "After these things" (7:1). It is suggested that the use of this statement is due to the period of time between the first return under the leadership of Zerubbabel around 539 B.C. and Ezra's return with the

second group around 458 B.C.¹⁰ In a period of approximately eighty years many things, besides those in chapters 1-6, could have happened. Following this statement is the description of Ezra's genealogy and spiritual/professional qualifications (vv.1b-6). With regard to his genealogy, it has been observed that the author of this source was not quite sure of Ezra's lineage or else, if he was, he portrayed Ezra with a particular goal he wanted to achieve. Scholars such as Pakkala maintain that because the author does not start Ezra's lineage from his immediate parents back to Joshua, but he starts from Seraiah who lived about 150 years before Ezra, this proves that "...the author of this verse was all but unaware of Ezra's real genealogy" (Pakkala, 2004:24). Following is a description of Ezra's profession which links to his mission in Jerusalem – "He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given" (v.6b). Because he was a teacher of the Law of God of Israel, his mission to Jerusalem was primarily to go and teach that law to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. This is what Brown considers to be the leading theme of the second part of the book of Ezra when he said, "The primary topic of this second plot is Ezra's mission to 'enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of God'" (2009:80). This is stated by King Artaxerxes in his commissioning letter. He clearly stated that the major purpose of Ezra's going up to Jerusalem was, "... to enquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regards to the Law of your God, which is in your hand" (v.14b). One particular note has to be made with regard to the genre of this imperial document. When it is taken as a unit, it has the genre of a letter. However, a close reading will give the impression that in one way or another it incorporates another genre – the narrative. In this narrative there is also a sense of rhetorical speech given by someone else apart from the king, aiming to persuade his intended audience.

Just before the end of chapter 7 a new perspective is introduced – first person. This is the perspective which will control the movement of the story throughout chapters 8 and 9. The last two verses of chapter 7 (vv. 27-28) is Ezra's prayer, praising God for what He did through the king. Ezra then prepares to set off to Jerusalem, but before that he presents a list of people who were registered and ready to go up with him (8:1-14). This reminds us of two things that have already been mentioned in the previous paragraphs. One is that in Ezra's

¹⁰ Hays (2008:75) argues that the narrator has the opportunity to select what he/she wanted to include in his/her narration. The narrator did not want to write down everything that happened between these two periods, and for that reason, he/she opted by choosing the expression "After these things".

writings, people as a group are more important than individual heroes. The other thing is that Ezra's leadership has a democratic attitude – the sharing of power. Combining these two aspects, Angel commented: “Ezra got others involved in bringing the Levites to Israel (8:16-20). This sets the tone for Ezra's transferring most of his authority to the people” (Angel, 2007:146). The next episode is a narrative which relates how the group travelled from Babylon up to Jerusalem, the delivering of all the temple utensils into the hands of the priests as well as the orders to the governor of the Trans-Euphrates Province. Everything was finished with a worship service to God (8:35-36).

Chapter 9 is known to be the crisis-moment¹¹ of the plot. The term crisis is purposefully used in this study, because, according to the Pyramidal model, the crisis is the driving force which keeps the story moving. When a scene reaches its most exciting point, where everything seems to be sorted out and stability is re-established, the story tension drops down, as if it were the end of it, and yet it creates the conditions for the next episode. In fact, this is one of the major characteristics of the Hebrew narratives, and it is the case here. “The apparent return to stability accomplished by the safe arrival of the returnees is shattered by Ezra's discovery that his people have been intermarrying with the peoples of the lands” (Brown, 2009:71). This crisis reported by the leader is opening the beginning of a new scene – Ezra's prayer for the returnees in general and about the issue of intermarriage in particular. Before the long prayer (9:6-15), Ezra gives a short record (9:1-5) in a narrative form of how the leaders reported to him about the situation of the intermarriage among the returnees, and how he reacted toward the situation. This short narrative, especially v.1, is very important in our understanding of who are the foreign women referred to here. Its full consideration is given in the next section.

Chapter 10 is the end of this plot, and the author has moved back to the third person perspective. The first 17 verses are in a narrative form. The author narrates the measures taken by Ezra and his leadership team to resolve the crisis and to re-establish stability in the community of the returnees. One of the elements which links this episode to the rest of the plot is Ezra's style of leadership – his attitude of sharing authority and responsibility with others. He does not act like a king or like Moses before his encounter with Jethro, though

¹¹ This term is used in the pyramidal model for plot analysis. For a full discussion, see Brown (2009:70-73).

some scholars have seen him taking the role of Moses as a law giver. Ezra wept together with the community; he listened to them and considered their opinions and together with them came to a common agreement to the solution of the crisis.

The last part of this scene is a list of those who were found guilty of intermarriage. In this list Angel (2007:147) has observed that those who had married foreign women, whose names appear in it, were about 113 men. Now, if we assume that each man had only one wife, the divorced women are to be the same number as of the men. If these 113 with an average of two children per woman were divorced and sent away, as the text says, where did these 399 people go? This number could probably increase if one would consider the possibility that some of these intermarriages took place soon after the first return, about eighty years before Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem, and some of them had already had grandchildren. This is the case found in Ezra 10:24 where Eliashib, the high priest (Nehemiah 13:28), is found to be one of those who had married a foreign woman, and in Nehemiah 13:28 it is reported that his grandson, the son of Joiada had married the daughter of Sanballat, the Horonite. So, this might be one of many cases. Unfortunately, the text is not quite explicit, or one could even say it is silent on this issue. For example, in verse 16a it simply says "So the exiles did as it was proposed"; verse 17 reads, "And by the first day of the first month they finished dealing with all the men who had married foreign women"; and the last verse, at the end of the list, says, "All these had married foreign women, and some of them had children by these wives" (v.44). Angel continues to argue that it is highly possible that most of these men remained with their foreign wives. This argument is based on the fact that Nehemiah had to face the same issue of intermarriage few years later. In other words, Ezra might have not succeeded as much as it is indicated in the text.

In conclusion, the two plots have shown to be a collection of different sources, namely imperial decrees, inventory, lists of people, letters and prayers. Both the Aristotelian and Pyramidal model fit well in this plot line. The first plot line is divided into three episodes. Though they are not organized chronologically, one can feel the sense of movement. It begins with a strong and positive mode in which both divine and human powers are involved until the settlement. Then there comes a conflict (a problem) which seems to disturb everything. Lastly, there is a solution and things go back to normal. In the second plot (chapters 7-10), there are two different perspectives, first and third person and there has been considered at least three approaches, such as due to editorial work, literary dynamics, and due to source

collection and each source having its own author. Another element profoundly important in Ezra's writings is the rhetorical language implied by the author. This kind of communication tends to be one-sided and aims to draw the audience to his point of view. Having mentioned rhetoric which, according to C. Clifton Black (1995:256), "generally bears on those distinctive properties of human discourse, especially its artistry and argument, *and it is the ability to choose proper terms and express them in a persuasive way* [emphasis mine] by which the authors of biblical literature have endeavored to convince others of the truth of their beliefs", the attention in the following paragraphs will be given to some key terms which the author of Ezra used to express persuasively his ideology.

2.4. Key Terms

According to the canonical text, right from the time Ezra left Babylon under the commission of King Artaxerxes until his arrival in Jerusalem, all was a great success. Ezra and his companions would not even look for human protection against bandits on the way, for they knew that "the gracious hand of our God was on everyone who trusted him" (8:22b) and, therefore, God would be their protector. The success of the mission culminated with a great celebration of worship and thanksgiving to the Lord, God of Israel. All the returnees gathered together and sacrificed burnt offerings to the Lord. It was indeed a time of great joy, not only for the success of Ezra's mission, but also for the positive support of the king. After a significantly extensive period of time under the opposition from those of the land and some of the kings, now there comes a direct representative of the highest figure of the entire empire, the king, which ensured the king's full support, not only material and political support, but also in terms of their identity formation, as it is stated, "You [Ezra] are sent by the king and his seven advisers to enquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God, which is in your hand" (Ezra 7:14). However, just at the end of this great celebration, there comes what is commonly known to be the highest moment in Ezra's mission, a report given by the elders of the community of the golah about how the life of the returnees had been for the last eight decades. It reads: "The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites. They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, and have mingled the holy seed with the peoples of the lands. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness" (Ezra 9:1-2). This report

functions as the highest tension of the plot and plays a great role in the upcoming episode – the abolition of intermarriages, which is the central topic of this study. For that reason, most of the key terms will be extracted from it.

2.4.1. The peoples of the lands

The report given by the elders of the community of the exile returnees stated that the people of Israel have not kept themselves separate from the peoples of the lands. The question that has occupied most of the modern biblical scholars is who were the peoples of the lands? Before I give any attention to this question, I will first consider some Hebrew canonical passages outside Ezra, which have applied this term in their writings. A. Philip Brown (2009) has outlined three different ways this term is used by Hebrew Bible authors. The first one is עַם הָאָרֶץ (the people of the land). According to Brown, this term has a double meaning, depending on its context. It can refer to the Israelites themselves, as it reads in Leviticus 4:27, “מֵעַם הָאָרֶץ” (from the people of the land). Modern translation reads, “...of the community of the land”, meaning the community of the people of Israel. The same term can be used to mean some particular nations, such as the Hittites. Gen. 23:7 reads: “אֲבָרָהָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לְעַם־הָאָרֶץ” (Abraham bowed down before the people of the land). The context of the term ‘people of the land’ in this verse is that when Abraham finished the negotiation with the Hittites about the acquisition of the land for the burial of his wife Sarah, he bowed down before them – the Hittites. The second category in which this term can be used is עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ (the peoples of the land). This term has also a double meaning; it can mean all the peoples on the earth, except the Israelites; for example 2 Chronicles 6:33, which reads, “כָּל־עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ” (all the peoples of the land). However, it can also mean all the people on the earth, including Israel. One example is found in Isaiah 24:4 “עַם־הָאָרֶץ” (the people of the land). Though the noun עַם is in singular form, in this context, it stands for leaders, and it includes the leaders of the nation of Israel. The third category is that of “גוֹי הָאָרֶץ” (the nations of the land), which has only one meaning – all the nations on the earth, including Israel. For example, in Genesis 18:18 where the Lord confirms Abraham’s blessing with a great nation, as it reads “וְנִבְרְכוּ בּוֹ כָּל־גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ” (and all the nations of the land will be blessed).

After analyzing all these three categories, Brown moved on to the writings of Ezra and observed that Ezra used none of these term to refer the people or the nation of Israel. In Ezra 3:3, for example, the author used “עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ” (the peoples of the lands), and in 4:4 he

employed “עם הארץ” (the people of the land). In both of these instances the author refers to the same group of people – those known as the enemies of the golah. Another category that Ezra used in his writings is “עמי הארצות” (the peoples of the lands) in Ezra 9:1, for example. Brown defends that the use of this term, different from other places outside Ezra, had nothing to do with geographical location or ethnic identity; it was rather primarily a matter of cultic-religious identity – people of abomination. This observation turns us to the question posited above – who were the peoples of the lands?

One group of scholars suggest that the “עמי הארצות” (the peoples of the lands) referred to pagan non-Jewish women who lived in the land. A. Philip Brown said, “The most common identification of the ‘foreign women’ is that they are pagan, non-Jewish women from the nations surrounding Judah” (2005:439). It has been indicated above that during the exilic times there was an international political pressure in the entire Mediterranean region. It is in these political instabilities that the supposed pagan women from the surrounding nations found their refuge in the land. About half a century later, when the exiles got freedom to come back to their homeland, they fell in love with these women and took them as wives. Another group of academics defend that this term referred to all the Jews (men and women) who did not go to the Babylonian exile¹². The advocates of this hypothesis are mainly those who refute the theory of complete deportation and full repopulation or the myth of empty land. They maintain that the Babylonians deported only the royal family and most of the members of the upper class and left the majority of the Abrahamic lineage in the land. The immediate implication of this way of defining the people of the land is that the ‘Israelites’ were only those who returned from the exile, and thus allowing a discontinuity between the pre and the postexilic communities; the former as being identified with Abraham, and the latter with the exilic event. The third group sustains the hypothesis of exclusivism. The golah used the term ‘peoples of the land’ to separate themselves ethnically, socially, economically, and religiously from the rest, both Jewish and non-Jewish people, who had remained in the land and therefore were labeled as non-true worshipers of Yahweh (Brown, 2009:160). Presumably, the understanding behind this assumption is that after the destruction of the temple and the deportation of all royal elite together with the temple personnel, those who were left behind had lost their ethnic and religious identity by mingling themselves with the

¹² Among those who support this hypothesis are Farisani (2003:37) and Grabbe (2004:287).

people from the neighboring nations, who had taken refuge in the land. By doing so, they had abandoned Yahweh and worshiped a different deity, as it is argued by Farisani in his attempt to understand why those of the land were refused to be part of the rebuilding of the temple. “It seems that implicit in this statement is the claim that the God of the returned exiles is not the same as the God of the people of the land” (2003:39).

2.4.2. The Eight nations

A short and yet important note will be about the eight nations mentioned in the section above. Two aspects are under discussion among biblical academics. One is about the mention of the Egyptians, Moabites and the Ammonites, yet in the source text these nations seem to be omitted, meaning God had nothing against marriage with women from these three nations. The other aspect is the question about the real existence of these nations during the time of Ezra. Modern biblical scholars are in agreement on the fact that during the time of Ezra many of these nations no longer existed, as Katherine Southwood has spoken out, “Of the nations enumerated, only the Ammonites, Moabites and Egyptians were still in existence during the postexilic period” (Southwood, 2011:52). Therefore, scholars such as Brown (2005) have strongly argued that these nations should not be viewed as a direct place of the origin of those women that the golah had intermarried. Brown combined the two aspects and approached them from the grammatical analysis, and observed that the plural common noun *כתועבתיהם* (abominations) is prefixed by a preposition of comparison ‘כ’ which means ‘as’ or ‘like’. In this case, the message communicated by the elders who presented the report to Ezra is that the returnees had married *נשים* not necessarily from those nations they mentioned, but *נשים* with *כתועבתיהם* just כ (like or according to or as) those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites (Ezra 9:1). A reading approached this way will conclude that first, the word ‘foreign’ does not necessarily mean geographical location and second, it does not refer only to ancestral differences. The central issue is that these women, whether of Abrahamic origin or not, were not different, as far as their relationship with Yahweh was concerned, from those nations aforementioned in Deuteronomy 7: 3-4.

2.4.3. Foreign Women

In connection to the *עמי הארצות* (peoples of the lands) is the term foreign women. Before I attempt to address the significance of this term, however, it would be beneficial for this study

to consider first the Ancient Hebrew understanding of the word ‘Foreigner’. Hans-Georg Wunch (2013) has significantly covered this topic in his article “The Stranger in God’s land – alien, stranger, guest: What can we learn from Israel’s attitude towards stranger?” Wunch approached this topic from a literary method and outlined at least three different perspectives. The first perspective refers to a foreigner or stranger who could be an Israelite living in an area where he/she did not belong. In Deuteronomy 25:5, for example, it reads: ‘לאיש זר’ (to a stranger man). The man here is identified as an Israelite who lives in the land of Israel but in a community different from his own. He is not a threat to any aspect of life of that particular community and, therefore, he is a זר. The second one refers to a stranger or foreigner who left his/her home country and went to stay in a foreign land, or a traveler who needed an accommodation for a night. Two examples can be pointed out: Psalms 119:19 ‘גר אנכי בארץ’ (I am a stranger on earth) and Job 31:32 ‘בהוץ לא-יילין גר’ (No stranger slept outside). Mary Douglas, in her article on “Responding to Ezra: The Priests and the Foreign Wives” observed, “When the priestly books insist on protected status for the foreigner sojourning in their land, they refer to the *ger* under God’s protection... and commands the people of Israel to see that the *ger* is treated justly” (2002:19-20). The third perspective points to a stranger or foreigner who is potentially dangerous to both cultic and social lives of Israel. The term employed here is נכר. For example, in Genesis 35:2 it reads, ‘את-אלהי הבכר’ (The foreign gods); 2 Chronicles 14:2 ‘מזבחות הנכר’ (Foreigner altars). In reaction to this term, Douglas observed that because both the Deuteronomistic and Priestly ideologies provide a strong protection to the גר (stranger/foreigner), “Ezra uses the term *nokri*, perhaps to evade the biblical strictures on behalf of the resident foreigner, *ger*. The play of the two words may have been very conscious, the priestly editors defending the rights of the resident stranger, their opponents using the more pejorative term and aiming to expel them” (2002:20). In other words, both terms גר and נכר have the same literary meaning – stranger or foreigner, but the latter is more dangerous than the former and, therefore, he/she/it has to be sent away from the community.

From here, one can now move to Ezra 10 and find out with which of the three categories above the author’s meaning of stranger or foreigner identifies. Ezra has repeatedly used the term foreign women about six times only in chapter 10 (vv. 2, 10, 11, 14, 18 and 44). In all these six times he employed the term ‘נשים נכריות’ which means foreign women. By using the term ‘נכריות’, Ezra understood these ‘נשים’ (women) to be potentially dangerous to both cultic

and social lives of the golah. It is from this understanding that one of the major concerns among Old Testament students has been the way Ezra portrays the women in his society; he seems to stress the point that the expression “עַמֵּי הָאֲרָצוֹת” (peoples of the lands) refers only to women and not men. When it is understood this way, it appears to sound exactly like what Claudia V. Camp said, “The first thing a feminist might notice in the Bible’s projection about intermarriage is the degree to which women, and not men, are the problem” (Camp, 2011:304). So in order to find out the reason behind this understanding, scholars compared the same expression found in other canonical texts, such as 1 Kings 11 and Nehemiah 13:26-27. The context of 1 Kings 11 is that of King Solomon not obeying God’s ordinance in Deuteronomy 7:3-4, which is against the taking foreign women as wives, because they would turn the heart of the Jewish spouse from worshiping Yahweh to idol worship. Just as the word of the Lord had said, when Solomon married the Egyptians, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittities, his heart forsook Yahweh and built shrines to the gods brought by his foreign wives and worshiped them. Consequently, years later, the nation of Israel was taken captive in Babylon. Even when Nehemiah in 13:26-27 heard about the situation of the returnees having taken foreign women as wives to themselves and to their sons, he indicated that the exilic experience was due to the same practice of King Solomon. From this understanding scholars came to the conclusion that the central issue about foreign women in Ezra was nothing less than idolatry. Jan Clauss stated, “Israel is not affected by mixed marriages as an ethnical entity, if understood in biologicistic, racist sense, but as a religious one” (Clauss, 2011:129). In other words, there may be other motives that caused the prohibition of intermarriage, as it is discussed below, but the outstanding one was that those foreign women had a very strong religious influence. They easily influenced both their husbands and children to adapt to their pagan religion. Another important indication of the nature of the problem of intermarriage is found in Ezra’s prayer. “O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens. From the days of our forefathers until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins...” (Ezra 9: 6-7). From the fact that in this prayer Ezra understood and interpreted the practice of intermarriage with foreign women as a sinful phenomenon, it became obvious that this was a religious/spiritual struggle. The returnees have sinned against God and, therefore, their relationship with God was seriously affected, and the consequences of this broken relationship would likely be unbearable.

2.4.4. Holy Seed

Another important term mentioned in the report is זרע הקדש (the holy seed). The leaders of the community of the returnees reported: “They have taken some of the daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy seed with the peoples of the lands” (9:2). Scholars have presented a range of possible meanings of the term and are classified in three groups. One group is represented by those who approach the term from the ethnic-racial point of view. Katherine Southwood is one of them and has argued that the term זרע (seed) can mean an agricultural seed, descendant or offspring, the beginning of an idea, a nation, or sperm (Southwood, 2011:57). She went on to observe that it does not matter which type of meaning the reporters might have referred to, the point is that when two different kinds of seeds are sown together, the result will never be legitimate. For Southwood, the obvious meaning of this term has to do with ethnicity. Other advocates of this approach are Christian and Karen S. Winslow. In agreement with Southwood, Frevel (2011:242) argues that the meaning of the term זרע (seed) in the context of the postexilic Judean community carries with it a clear connotation of man’s genital discharge (sperm) and, therefore, it stood as one of the strong tools for ethnic identity and preservation. Any sexual intercourse with a non-Jewish partner would result into two consequences, depending on the final outcome. A mingling which does not result in an offspring would mean contamination of the pure seed in the Jewish partner. More seriously would be when the mingling resulted in an offspring. For the *golah*, this phenomenon would be like the mingling of a cat and dog in which one would wonder what the outcome would be, a cat or a dog or neither of the two. In support to Southwood and Frevel’s argument, Karen S. Winslow stated, “In my view, the tension created by the wife-taking traditions throughout the Hebrew Bible is related to the social tensions over identity formation and ethnicity construction among the Second Temple Jews who processed these traditions and produced a set of Scripture” (Winslow, 2011:132). However, Dor Yonina (2003:31), while admitting that the concept of the holy seed tends to point to ethnic-racism, approaches it from the holiness point of view when he stated, “According to its literal meaning, this phrase implies opposition to racial-biological mixing, but some attempt to soften this impression by understanding it as a means of preserving the purity of the religion and its practices”. The second group of scholars handle this topic from the socio-religious and political approach in the Persian context. Bob Becking (2011:62) highlights the Persian religious (Zoroastrianism) understanding about the issue of intermarriage. In this religion, to marry someone from a different ethnic group, even if he/she

is from the same religious belief, was considered anathema; the person had denounced his/her faith and therefore would be excommunicated from the Zoroastrian community. Socio-politically, in Athens, for example, one of the requirements for acceptance to full membership in the civil community was to have both parents (maternal and paternal) ethnically Attic descendants. Moreover, Arthur J. Wolak (2012:97) defends that ethnic diversity in Persia did indeed exist as means of administrative purposes. According to Wolak, the Torah also supported the Persian political philosophy of encouraging the creation of barriers between ethnic groups and, therefore, “[It] would have been under political pressure from the Achaemenid authorities to maintain a clearly delineated ethnic identity”. The third approach to the topic is based on the messianic line. Scholars such as T. Desmond Alexander (1997) defend that the term ‘holy seed’ goes back to Genesis 3:15; 12:7; and 22:17. Alexander argues that the term ‘seed’ can mean either singular or plural. Where the term is considered in its singular form, it can mean a lineage which points to a king or leader who will liberate his people from their enemy. “The book of Genesis not only intimates that this lineage will eventually give rise to a royal dynasty, but also anticipates that a future member of the line will conquer his enemies and mediate God’s blessing to the nations of the earth” (Alexander, 1997:367). From this approach, advocates of this perspective have argued that Ezra, in his marriage reform, had in mind that the intermarriage with the non-golah women would corrupt the holy seed of Abraham which pointed to the coming of the Messiah. Alexander (1997:367) concluded, “Such expectations are clearly important for appreciating how the book of Genesis contributes to the NT understanding of Jesus Christ.” This theory, however, has been canonically challenged from the fact that the writings of Ruth have proved it false, because David, the king who has been directly attached to the messianic throne, is from a lineage of non-Jewish woman – Ruth the Moabite.

2.4.5. Divorce

The last key term to be considered in this chapter is divorce. From the report above, we read: “The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the peoples of the lands with their abominations...” (9:1a). In other words, those who were involved in intermarriage never thought of divorcing their wives. As it has been mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the phenomenon of intermarriage had put the whole nation in danger and, therefore, there should be a way to reverse the situation. One and the only way that the nation would be redeemed from this doom, according to Ezra’s ideology,

was to dismiss all the foreign wives and send them away together with their children, as it reads: “We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel. Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and of those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law” (10:2b-3). From the author’s point of view, this solution was not to please men, but it was to satisfy Yahweh and stop His fury upon the nation; it was in harmony with the Law of Moses and the life and behavior of those who feared the Lord, God of Israel (10:3). It is here that a question arises, did God ever allow divorce? Before any attempt to answer this question, it would be important to briefly go over first the biblical understanding on the issue of intermarriage.

Biblically speaking, intermarriage seems to be something that has never been approved, but also it had never been as critical as it sounds to be in the Second Temple Judean Community. Christian Frevel (2011) introduced a study entitled “Mixed Marriages: Intermarriage and Group Identity in the Second Temple Period” undertaken by about fifteen scholars by proposing that the subject of intermarriage in the context of Second Temple Judean Community should be approached from the diachronic perspective. This means that it has to be understood as a phenomenon that went through a process of development, interpretation and adjustment into different contexts throughout the history of the Hebrew Bible – from the Patriarchal era to the Hellenistic period. In their essay “Deepening the Water: First Steps to a Diachronic Approach on Intermarriage in the Hebrew Bible” (Frevel, 2011:15-45), Frevel and Conczorowski outlined three phases of intermarriage. They call the first one Patriarchal phase. In this phase the major concern was morality. From the patriarchal point of view, it was immoral for one to get involved in an intercultural marriage. For that reason, the patriarchs recommended that their sons should go to their parental family to find a wife, “So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him and commanded him: ‘Do not marry a Canaanite woman. Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother’s father Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother’” (Genesis 28:1-2). The second feature is identified as Deuteronomistic in which the focal point was religious apostasy. Frevel and Conczorowski observed that the idea behind Deuteronomy 7:3-4, for instance, was that marriage with the Canaanites would mean forsaking Yahweh and bringing in the worship of other gods. The third feature is the Priestly point of view, in which

the issue is not morality or apostasy, but cultic, which is the case with the postexilic community. The main purpose in Ezra-Nehemiah's context was to protect the priesthood and the temple, supposedly due to Hellenistic social, political and religious challenges and the existence of various groups that identified themselves with Yahweh.

Moreover, Karen S. Winslow, in her essay about "Mixed Marriages on Torah Narratives" (2011:132-149), argued that, though both the patriarchal narratives and the Torah seem to oppose intermarriage, other texts present a positive view. She defended that foreign women, such as Tamar, Asenath, Zipporah, Moses's Cushite wife, Ruth, to mention only few, had contributed greatly to the establishment of Israel, because their children were incorporated into Israel's tribe. One example is found in Genesis 48 where Jacob incorporates Manasseh and Ephraim, Joseph's Egyptian sons, into the twelve tribes of Israel. "Now then, your sons born to you in Egypt before I came to you here will be reckoned as mine; Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as Ruben and Simon are mine" (Gen. 48:5). Winslow went on to say that most of these foreign women were married to some of the patriarchs and most respected figures in the history of Israel. This is the case of Abraham (the so-called the father of the nation) to Hagar and later to Keturah; Judah (the most important among the twelve tribes) to Tamar; Joseph to the Egyptian Asenath; and Moses (the founder of the Hebrew nation) to Zipporah then to his Cushite wife.

As far as the issue of intermarriage is concerned, it seems like there has never been an incident where divorce took place, until the time of Ezra. For example, the sending away of Hagar, Abraham's Egyptian wife, in Genesis 16, was not God's initiative. Instead, when Sarai, her mistress sent her away, the angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar and commanded her to go back to Abraham with the condition that the Lord would increase her descendants. Another incident of great relevance for this study is found in Numbers 12. The text indicates that God was greatly displeased with Aaron and Miriam's negative attitude towards Moses' marriage with the Cushite woman. God approved Moses of being the most faithful among the prophets when He said, "When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions; I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in my entire house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" (Numbers 12:6-8). Consequently, Miriam was severely punished, because she had disapproved Moses' marriage and tried to influence Moses to divorce his wife. Moreover, the writings of Malachi

stated explicitly that God does not like divorce when they read, “‘I hate divorce’, says the Lord God of Israel, ‘and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,’ says the Lord Almighty”¹³ (Malachi 2:16). How then should one reconcile this biblical understanding about intermarriage and divorce with Ezra’s promulgation of divorce in the Second Temple Judean Community?

In an attempt to reconcile these two extremes, scholars insist that intermarriage and divorce in the Second Temple context should be approached from a priestly/cultic point of view. It was the only way that the intended readers of the Second Temple Community, in its unique context, could combat idolatry and then be able to maintain the holiness of Yahweh and his temple. Otherwise, the whole nation would be in danger of complete destruction, as A. Philip Brown stated it correctly, “Holiness was absolutely essential for the continuation and well-being of the returnees. If they did not remain separate from the abominable practices of their neighbors, they were liable to be totally annihilated” (2005:457). Moreover, scholars have observed that the solution commanded by God in case of idolatry was heavier than divorce. Here it reads, “If your own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, ‘Let us go and worship other gods...’ do not spare him or shield him. You must certainly put him to death” (Deut. 13:6-11). After comparing God’s command with the measures taken by Ezra towards idolatry, Brown concluded, “Separation therefore provided a merciful remedy for the wives, and at the same time it removed the inevitable spiritual danger they posed to their husbands and thus to the whole golah community” (2009:175). In other words, in Ezra’s context all the wives and their children were supposed to be put to death, because they led the golah to idol worship. Ezra and the elders of the community were full of mercy and decided to spare their lives by divorcing and sending them away.

2.5. Conclusion

This section has outlined five key terms. The first one is the peoples of the lands which may mean the pagan non-Jewish women, the non-golah Jews (those who did not go to the exile in

¹³ In the Targum version this verse renders the opposite. It reads, “For if you hate her, divorce her” (Metzger, 2001:24). According to Metzger, this contraction is due to the fact that since in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 Moses seemed to allow divorce, so the Targumist did not want to contradict himself with what is found in the Pentateuch.

Babylon), or both Jews and non-Jews who never identified themselves as Yahweh worshipers during the exilic period. The second term is the eight nations in relation to the abomination of the peoples. From a grammatical point of view, the people of the abomination did not necessarily come from those nations mentioned by the elders in their report to Ezra. Instead, their detestable practices were like those of the people from such nations. The third term is foreign women, a term which seems to have nothing with geographical location or tribal lineage, but worship. They belonged in the kingdom of idols and therefore were foreigners in Yahweh's kingdom. The fourth term is holy seed which has a strong ethnical connotation. Inter-marriage was seen to be the only means that the *golah* would lose their ethnic identity and consequently snuff it out. Lastly, it is the term divorce. This study has observed that divorce was the appropriate solution for this crisis due to the fact that it was in harmony with the Law of God and a requirement for those who fear the Lord. More than that, the idolatrous wives deserved death, according to Deuteronomy 13:6-11, but the Yahwists were so merciful to the extent that they spared the lives of those wives and chose to divorce and send them away.

At this point, this study has given an overview of literature studying, the background of the Second Temple Judean Community, in chapter one. It was indicated that though the Babylonian experience in 587/6 B.C. could be seen as a matter of physical and political devastations, it meant more than that; it was a loss of group identity. Ancient Israel had lost their self-existence which was built upon Abrahamic and Mosaic traditions, divine promise of the land, and David dynasty. When the political policy in the Mediterranean Region changed, half a century later, and the exiles were given freedom to return to their homeland, it was a potential opportunity for the returnees to re-establish their lost identity by means of recovering their Patriarchal and Deuteronomistic traditions, their promised land, and their dynasty, at this time not centred on David or any other individual king but rather on the temple. The Second Temple literature, in particular Ezra and Nehemiah, is an attempt to construe an ideology of identity formation by excluding others. In chapter two, the focus was on the text itself – a literary analysis. This was the best place to start, taking into account that the key purpose of any biblical reading and interpretation is to listen to the text and aim to understanding its message, as Tate said it well, “This canonically accepted text is the starting point of all biblical exegesis. This text is what the Church has taken into its life and what remains with the Church to the present day” (2008:83). In this process, it has been observed

that in terms of genre and composition, the writings of Ezra are a compilation of different sources, such as Ezra memoirs, imperial documents, various correspondences, utility inventories, lists of names of people and prayers. The implied author has pulled all these different sources together and, with no attention to their chronological order, he persuasively construed his ideology based on cultic identity which seemed to be the core motive for the promulgation of divorce and sending away of the foreign wives and their children. Now we move on to the next chapter to analyze the position of Ezra 10 in the context of Ezra-Nehemiah's writing.

Chapter 3

Ezra 10 in the context of Ezra-Nehemiah's Writings

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, this study has given special attention to the literary analysis – a careful examination of the final form of Ezra's writings, and it has been observed that first, the writings of Ezra are a composition of different sources, such as memoirs, prayers, imperial documents, letters, lists of people's names and inventories. Second, like many other Old Testament writings, the different resources that are used to compose Ezra's text are not in chronological order, probably due to the editorial activity that the text experienced throughout the years before canonization. In addition to this point, it has been indicated that it is highly possible that the text of Ezra is not a work of a single author/editor but of different schools or individual scribes. Third, the majority of modern scholars agrees on the fact that most of Ezra's sources are genuine but have been expanded by the editors without changing the data. It is, therefore, on the grounds of these observations and in a quest for the relationship of the issue of intermarriage in Ezra 10 to the entire corpus of Ezra-Nehemiah writings that the present chapter will approach this study from a redaction and editorial perspective of Ezra's writings– an approach which defends “that the authors were guided in their adaptation, modification, and arrangement of their sources by theological purposes” (Tate, 2008:180).

Pakkala (2004) is one of the scholars who has contributed significantly in this area, and he paid particular attention to Ezra 7-10 and Nehemiah 8, which accommodated issues such as the coming of Ezra to Jerusalem, the imperial letter attributed to Artaxerxes, Ezra's prayer, the dismissal of intermarriages and the reading of the Torah. In the first place, Pakkala argues that if any Old Testament text has ever experienced a heavy editorial work at a later date, it is the book of Ezra.¹ This observation is based on the fact that most of the material in the book of Ezra is presented in an unrelated and atypical manner. For example, Pakkala observed that

¹ Pakkala (2004:7) has strongly argued that, even if one finds it possible, it is not easy to bring different and unrelated material into one document without modifying and rearranging them. This is the case in Ezra's writings. In the process of combining these sources into one book, the editor had compromised the contextual meaning as well as the chronological order of some traditions in order to accommodate his contemporary situation.

Ezra's memoirs (EM) are not only in the book of Ezra (chapters 7-10), they are also found in Nehemiah's writings, especially in chapter 8 where the author ascribes the reading of the law to Ezra (2004:3). Now if this is the case, one of the leading questions in this chapter will be, how did Ezra's text look before the editorial work, and how does it sound, after the adaptation, modification and rearrangement? In an attempt to answer this question, the present chapter will devote its attention to the following aspects: Ezra chapter 10 in relation to chapters 1-6; Ezra 10 in relation to chapters 7-9; the editorial influences in Ezra 10; and Ezra 10 in the context of the writings of Nehemiah 8-13. Before moving to the first point, however, it is profoundly important that we address briefly the historicity of Ezra's writings and their relationship with Nehemiah's.

3.2. Historicity of Ezra's Writings

One of the major subjects in the field of Old Testament studies is about the reliability of the Hebrew Bible in reconstructing the history of Ancient Israel. Israel Finkelstein and Amihai Mazar are among biblical and archaeological scholars who have substantially contributed into this subject. In their literary work entitled 'The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and History of Ancient Israel', Finkelstein and Mazar (2007) observed that Old Testament intellectuals classify themselves into three schools of thought: maximalists, minimalists, and the centrists. The maximalists uphold that the Old Testament writings are historically justified and are, therefore, faithful sources to regenerate the history of Ancient Israel. According to Finkelstein, this school "follows the biblical text of the history of Israel in the way the ancient writers wanted us to read it, that is, as a reliable record of Israel's history, narrated in sequential chronological order, from earlier to later periods" (2007:10). In other words, all biblical narratives or episodes are events that happened in human history at a certain point in time and place, and they were recorded by individuals or groups of people who directly participated and witnessed them. With regards to this perspective, McKenzie would argue that in responding, for example, to the question about the biblical narrative of Jonah and the fish, "Could a person really survive for three days and nights inside a whale? Some staunchly defend the possibility..." (2005:2). This means that the maximalists would affirm categorically and rhetorically that a man or woman, not just a child but a normal man or woman, could of course go through a big fish's teathed mouth without losing a single member of his/her body or even having suffered a slight scratch and remain alive in the fish's properly functioning belly for at least three days and nights, because nothing is impossible

with God, as the Bible would confirm, “Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:36-37). The other school of thought, the minimalists, denies the objectivity of the Hebrew Bible narratives and views it as merely inventions and literary art of Hebrew scribes. According to the students of this school, “the continuing power of the biblical narratives is a testimony to the literary skills of the authors, who stitched together old myths, folktales, imaginary records, legendary narratives, and a few memories of historical facts (about the ninth to early sixth centuries B.C.) into a single saga of apostasy and redemption” (Finkelstein and Mazar, 2007:12). In other words, biblical texts are pure fiction and, therefore, one should never even think of using them in his/her quest for Israel’s antiquity. The position of this school in relation to the book of Ezra is well stated by Bob Becking, when he wrote, “No real events are narrated in the Book of Ezra, and the character of Ezra is to be seen as an invention of later Judaism” (2011:8). Grabbe, though aware of the fact that our access to the past events is mostly indirect, affirmed: “I am much more sceptical of the book of Ezra as a usable source than many scholars; on the other hand, it seems to me that assuming that a personal writing of Nehemiah is at the heart of the book of Nehemiah is justified even though the reasons for doing so are somewhat subjective” (2004:13-14). This approach is, furthermore, sustained by other modern scholars such as Thomas B. Dozeman whose article on ‘Geography and History in Herodotus and in Ezra-Nehemiah’ argued that some of the letters attributed to certain kings in the writings of Ezra-Nehemiah are not to be objectively conceived. Instead, “The reply of Artaxerxes to Rehum, that past kings of Jerusalem ruled Abar Naharah (4:20), is not history. Thus, despite the emphasis by Artaxerxes on archives, written records, and research, the content of his letter indicates that the territory plays a role in the ideological world of Ezra-Nehemiah” (Dozeman, 2003:451).

Finally, it is with the centrist school of thought which Finkelstein, Mazar and other modern Old Testament students identify themselves. Though it is unrealistic to take the biblical text as one of the primary sources to be used in any attempt to reconstruct the history of Israel, the text plays a great role in this area in the sense that it is “a play back memory” (if one were to put it in Finkelstein’s terms) of events which had happened in far past and were adapted to the needs of the authors’ or composers’ contemporary situation for theological purposes. In fact, Finkelstein stated it this way, “I imagine the historical perspective in the Hebrew Bible as a telescope looking back in time: the farther in time we go back, dimmer the picture

becomes...The further we get from the supposed events, the stories become more imaginative and symbolic, and are perhaps accompanied by greater distortion of earlier information” (2007:30-31). Another centrist scholar is Bob Becking. In addressing the topic about ‘Rethinking Historiography’, Becking agrees with the majority of the centrists on the fact that just like other Old Testament writings, Ezra’s text is ‘a re-enactment’ – to employ a term used by Becking. This means Ezra’s text is a narration of far past historical events. He then concluded, “All these remarks lead me to the supposition that the Book of Ezra is not to be seen as a primary source or as a piece of evidence as such, but as a narration” (2011:21). Again, these are events or episodes that took place in the distance past, in a certain socio-historical and, probably, theological context, whose eye witnesses and direct participants are no more to be consulted, and now recorded/narrated by third or fourth or even fifth audience. In this case, the historicity of the account is not genuine in the sense of what history means from our modern point of view; it has gone through minor or even major changes in favor of the narrator’s worldview and his contemporary situation. Erhard Gerstenberger is another scholar who supports this perspective. In his comments about the imperial documents in Ezra-Nehemiah, Gerstenberger (2011:159) said, “The account about the building of the temple in Ezra 4:6-6:18 belongs to the Imperial Aramaic language, which was considered an official idiom. It is indeed possible that official documents were included; nevertheless, in principle one should reckon with the narrative being fictitious”. Japhet, in her article entitled ‘The Temple in the Restoration Period: Reality and Ideology’, summarizes by arguing that, “The fact that the unit narrates the construction of the Temple does not mean that it was written at the same time. Conversely, the possibility that the unit was composed at a chronological and ideological distance from the events it describes does not necessarily imply that all the information found within it is unreliable” (1991:198). In short, centrists maintain that the biblical texts are both useful yet useless for historical reconstruction. They are effective in the sense that some of them have happened, and in their long period of oral tradition, later on in written form, they were adjusted, interpreted and adapted into the needs of their contemporary community. They are equally useless to the point that they cannot fully reconstruct the history of the ancient community. Pakkala, when addressing the issue of the authenticity of Artaxerxes’ rescript in Ezra’s text, summarizes the understanding of the three schools on the topic as follows: “The authenticity of the rescript has been extensively discussed, with views ranging from complete rejection to general recognition, and everything in between” (2004:46). This is to say that, with regards to the question as to whether the

Bible should be used as a reliable source to reconstruct the history of early Israel, Pakkala seems to agree with those who advocate the existence of three schools of thought. One which defends complete objectivity of the biblical narratives; another one maintains that the biblical narratives are mere myths and have nothing to do with history; and the third upholds that some of the biblical narratives are historically justified to an extent that they are memories of what happened in the far past, and the other ones are simply a testimony of God's interaction with his people and therefore are not to be read historically.

3.3. The Relationship between Ezra and Nehemiah's Writings

With regard to the relationship between Ezra and Nehemiah's writings, one of the prominent questions addressed by biblical scholars is whether it should be 'Ezra-Nehemiah' or 'Ezra and Nehemiah'. Another way of saying it is whether these writings should be considered one book or two different books. This topic has been significantly addressed in chapter one of this study; however, for the sake of the present chapter's content, it is important that we give an overview of different perspectives concerning the relationship between these two literary works, in the areas of composition, literary, authorship and canonization. From the literary point of view, Pakkala argues that the writings of Ezra and those of Nehemiah are closely related and dependent on each other. For example, after a careful analysis of the two prayers in Ezra 9 and in Nehemiah 1, Pakkala concluded that: "It is hard to deny that Ezra's prayer in Ezra 9:6-15 is closely related to Nehemiah's prayer in Nehemiah 1:5-11. The similarities are too extensive to avoid the impression that they are literarily dependent" (2004:122). Pakkala goes on to argue that it is much easier for one to understand the context of Nehemiah's prayer in the first chapter after reading Ezra 9 -10. In his prayer, Nehemiah addresses two major themes. One is about the sins committed by the people of Israel, as it reads "I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you" (1:6b). Just after this confession, Nehemiah shifts his attention, in the next seven chapters, from the spiritual matters to the physical and social concerns of the people of Israel. It is in chapter 9 that Nehemiah comes back to the spiritual concerns of the people. Consequently, a reader of Nehemiah's prayer in chapter 1 might encounter questions as to which sins Nehemiah is referring to in his prayer. Another theme in Nehemiah's prayer pointed out by Pakkala is disobedience, "We have acted very wickedly toward you; we have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses" (1:7). Again, one might be wondering as to what were the wicked actions that were committed by the returnees in disobedience to the

laws of the Lord. According to Pakkala, these and other related questions might be answered after reading Ezra 9 – 10 where the sins and the wicked actions of the people of Israel are explicitly mentioned as follows, “Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra, ‘We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us’” (Ezra10:2a). This was indeed an explicit violation of God’s commandments which forbade any marriage with the women of the land, “For we have disregarded the commands you gave through your servants the prophets when you said: ‘The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruptions of its peoples. By their detestable practices they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other. Therefore, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters for your sons...’” (9:10b-12a). Pakkala concluded by elucidating that “Nehemiah chapter 1 tries to knit the two books together” (2004:123).

The second perspective is the compositional one. On the one hand, Grabbe (2004:72) agrees completely with Pakkala on the fact that the unity of Ezra-Nehemiah is shown in the literary and structural features. Grabbe demonstrates this point with a carefully outlined theological and structural parallel of elements in both writings, such as the concept of royal commissioning, the list of the returnees, the opposition from the peoples of the land, God’s involvement in the whole process of rebuilding the altar, the temple and the wall, the reading of the law by Ezra, the issue of intermarriages and their dismissal and so on². On the other hand, Grabbe argues that besides the literary unity which is explicitly found in these writings, there is another factor which unifies the two sets of writings – the compositional element. Grabbe stated, “So far the unity of Ezra-Nehemiah has been emphasized in looking at its structure; however, it is important to emphasize that the present unity of Ezra and Nehemiah is an editorial unity” (2004:73). This approach takes the two hypotheses into consideration. One is that the editor(s) brought the different sources together in a way that they become related to and depended on each other. The other one looks at the assumption that some of the materials of Ezra-Nehemiah’s writings, as a composition of different sources and traditions, have been moved from one place to another in a way that they are not understood in isolation, as Breneman has correctly articulated, “Many scholars assume that the material now in Nehemiah 8-10 was originally part of Ezra 7-10 and was moved to associate Ezra and

² For full discussion, see Grabbe (2004:72).

Nehemiah with one another in a common activity” (1993:38). However, other scholars contend that the work of the editors not only brings the writings of Ezra-Nehemiah into a unit, but it also opens the possibility of having them as two separate works - Ezra and Nehemiah. The major argument here is that while it might be appropriate to consider all these sources and traditions as a whole, it is also advisable to look at them separately. Although Grabbe has identified himself as an advocate of Ezra-Nehemiah’s unity, he is also one of the scholars who support the separatist way of reading Ezra and Nehemiah’s writings, when he asserted, “On the other hand, it is perfectly legitimate to go behind the editor and interpret the traditions separately” (2004:73). This way of reading Ezra-Nehemiah motivates one to admit that though the final editor(s) have tried to integrate different traditions into one document, still there is a feeling that each individual document or tradition stands in its own context. The chronological order of such documents, as it is already mentioned above, can illustrate this point.

In relation to the authorial perspective, the purpose at this point is not to repeat what is already said in the first chapter of this study. Instead, it is a matter of emphasis. Two approaches will be highlighted here. One is that which maintains the assumption of one individual school or scribe who took the responsibility to edit the final work. This theory does not disregard the possibility that the writings of Ezra and Nehemiah might have been a work of many authors/editors, and for that reason Breneman concluded: “Finally, someone, whether Ezra (the most likely possibility), Nehemiah, or another recognized teacher of Israel ‘whose heart God had moved,’ added Ezra 1-6 and shaped the whole work into a historical-theological document that would edify and stabilize the new restored community as the people of God” (1993:41). The other approach is from the thematic point of view, which supports that the two sets of writings have different central themes. It maintains that while Ezra’s writings focused on spiritual reconstruction of the returnees, the central theme in Nehemiah is the physical reconstructions and societal security. Becking put it this way, “Ezra is a priestly book interested in features as the temple, priesthood, Levites and purity, in short the cult. The book of Nehemiah, on the other hand, has a lay perspective. The book of Ezra focusses on the restoration of the temple and community, while Nehemiah stresses the importance of the repopulation of Jerusalem and the building of defensive wall around the city” (2011:5-6). From this perspective, a close look at Ezra-Nehemiah’s writings can indicate that in the whole process of text reception, there were two or more schools or

individual scribes with different theological perspectives and at a late stage one identity edited them as if it were one single book. This point leads us to canonical perspective.

By a canonical perspective of Ezra-Nehemiah's writings this study refers essentially to the way these texts have been considered and positioned in different biblical versions, which include the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, Vulgate and the Christian Bible³. One of the reasons sometimes, even today, some scholars talk of 'Ezra-Nehemiah' and not 'Ezra and Nehemiah' is that right from the beginning the Ancient Hebrew community in general treated them as one single literary work. Klein commented that, "Although this work was already separated into two books by Origen and Jerome, the division does not appear in the Hebrew Bible until the fifteenth century, and the statistics traditionally given at the end of a biblical book 'final massorah'⁴ come only at the end of the twenty-three chapters of Ezra-Nehemiah" (2007:144). This is exactly the point brought by Lasor, Hubbard and Bush when they indicated that "the end of Ezra lacks the expected final Masoretic notes, the total verse-count at the end of Nehemiah is for both books, and the middle verse given assumes a combined work" (2003:551). Lasor, Hubbard and Bush went on to argue that unlike our modern version which identifies Ezra-Nehemiah text with historical narratives, in Hebrew Bible Ezra-Nehemiah is considered as one of the writings and is placed just before the books of Chronicles. The Septuagint (LXX), on the other hand, identifies Ezra-Nehemiah with some of the apocryphal writings, in this case the book of Esdras. Therefore, there was a high possibility that these books would be considered apocryphal. To avoid this possibility, "Ezra and Nehemiah were called Esdras B to distinguish them from an apocryphal book" (Pfeiffer, 1966:423). The Vulgate translation as well as the Masoretic version had a sense of two separate books and did not avoid any identification with the apocryphal writings, as they are named 1 Esdras and 2 Esdras to mean Ezra and Nehemiah respectively (Lasor, Hubbard and Bush, 2003:551). Finally, in the Christian Bible, starting in the 3rd century A.D. to our modern versions, Ezra-Nehemiah's writings became gradually known and treated as two independent books, as Pfeiffer summarized it well when he said, "The Jews considered it [the book of Ezra] to be one book with Nehemiah, but the repetition of Ezra 2 in Nehemiah 7

³ By Christian Bible, this study means the reception of the Septuagint into the Christian context, starting with the Church Fathers to the Reformation Era.

⁴ The end of a book in the Hebrew Bible was indicated by a remark on the total number of verses of the respective book.

indicates that the two books were originally distinct works” (1966:423), and unlike the Hebrew Bible, here they are canonically identified with historical writings, such as 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles.

In conclusion, as far as the reliability of Ezra’s writings for reconstruction of the history of Ancient Israel is concerned, biblical scholars are divided into three schools of thought. One advocates a high degree of objectivism and historical reliability of Ezra’s writings. The other one defends that, like any other Old Testament literature, Ezra’s writings are merely a result of creativity of the Second Temple scribes. The third school of thought understands Ezra’s writings as summarized by Céline Mongan, “The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are read rather more frequently since they are the main source in the Bible for the understanding of the post-exilic period in the history of Israel. It would be a mistake, however, to think that they present an accurate historical record of the exact way in which the events of the period occurred” (1982:1). In other words, it is true that narratives reflect historical events that took place in the past and have been adjusted into the editor’s contemporary situation. With regards to the relationship between Ezra and Nehemiah’s text, Old Testament scholars have outlined at least four perspectives. One is the literary perspective which mainly supports the unity of the two sets of writings. The other one is the editorial approach which sustains the unity but also opens the possibility that the two books should be seen as two independent works. The third perspective is the canonical one. Both in the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint Ezra-Nehemiah writings are treated as one book, while in the Christian Bible (both Vulgate and modern translations) they are categorized as two separate books. The fourth approach is the authorial one. In this approach scholars argue that the different sources that comprise the book of Ezra were authored by different identities, and the hypothesis of one author is due to editorial work; a certain identity (whether individual or institution), with his/its theological agenda in mind, took the different sources from different perspectives and rearranged/edited them to make a new document. This is the topic of the next paragraphs.

3.4. Ezra 10 in Relation to Ezra 1-6

In the previous chapter, this study has indicated that the book of Ezra is divided into two major units. The first unit is comprised of chapters 1-6 and is commonly known as the first return of the Jews or the reconstruction of the Temple of Jerusalem under Zerubbabel. The second unit includes chapters 7-10 and is called the second return of the Jews or the

reconstruction of the Jewish community under Ezra (see chapter 2). The first part, which is the focus in this section, is clear and straight forward in terms of its central theme – “The longest and most detailed composition is Ezra 1-6, a self-contained unit within the book of Ezra-Nehemiah devoted entirely to the building of the Temple” (Japhet, 1991:197). According to Japhet, the Temple is the central theme in this unit. To prove this point, the author of Ezra 1-6 introduces his writings with the most known biblical and extra biblical document, the so-called ‘Cyrus’ edict, which says, “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you – may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem” (1:2-3). For Cyrus, his coming to political power over the Mediterranean region was a divine plan. His major responsibility in this plan was to build the temple to God of Israel. Eskenazi is another biblical scholar who sides with Japhet and believes in the centrality of the temple in this unit. However, unlike many other modern scholars, Eskenazi reads Ezra-Nehemiah’s writing from the perspective of one book and observes that as the narrative rolls on in Ezra-Nehemiah, the central theme in Ezra 1-6 dies off and a new theme in Nehemiah emerges – the walls of Jerusalem. She said, “The temple is important in Ezra-Nehemiah. However, it gets somewhat lost in the complexity of the account. Its completion and the ceremony which follows are reported briefly (Ezra 6:10-18). Far more dramatic an event in Ezra-Nehemiah, if one judges by the space allotted to it, is the building of the walls (Nehemiah 3:1-4:25). It overshadows the building of the temple” (1986:54). This observation is based on the concept that Ezra-Nehemiah is a unit, but when the focus is on this particular division – Ezra 1-6, the temple remains an unlost theme. In fact, until the last verses of Ezra 6 the focus is still the temple. When Darius issued a decree that the rebuilding of the temple should resume, he made it clear that violation of that edict was a crime, and the violator would be awarded with a severe punishment (6:11-12). The rest of the verses (13 – 22) are dedicated to events directly related to the temple, such as its dedication, the giving of sin offering, institution of temple offices, and the reinstatement of the Passover which ended with a remarkable statement about the temple in verse 22, “For seven days they celebrated with joy the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because the Lord had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the kings of Assyria, so that he assisted them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel.

On the one hand, contextual scholars maintain that the exiles were granted freedom to go back to their homeland due to the Persian's different philosophy of imperialism, as marked by Kessler who said, "The chief matter in hand was the collection of imperial tax" (2008:129). A new and multi-ethnic and cultural empire such as the Achaemenid needed not only political security⁵, but also economic stability⁶. It is argued that the Persian rulers together with the religious leaders in Jerusalem used the temple to collect taxes which were used to run the empire. Grabbe has correctly articulated that, "Since there are parallels elsewhere in the Persian Empire for the temples being used to collect taxes for the government, this is not an unlikely situation" (2004:208). On the other hand, canonical⁷ readers sustain, though with a certain level of sensitivity,⁸ that the author of Ezra understood and interpreted the Persian policy primarily from the religious point of view. According to Kessler:

In some fundamental features of imperial policy as well, the Persian Empire stood apart from its predecessors. The first thing we must emphasize is the partial reversal of the Assyria and Babylon's policy of deportation. A further expansion of this policy meant that the Persian Empire granted partial autonomy to the peoples of their provinces which applied primarily to cultural (which at that time meant primarily religious) affairs⁹.

This understanding is strongly reflected in the Cylinder document which is popularly attributed to Cyrus. This document affirms explicitly that Cyrus came to power solely to fulfill a divine plan and, therefore, his primary duty was to build the temple in Jerusalem to

⁵ Both historians and archaeologists have indicated that it has never been an easy task for the Achaemenid rulers to avoid rebellious manifestations. Therefore, one of the top priorities of the Achaemenid Empire was to secure a good and well pleased military force to avoid any political instability. For a full discussion, see Grabbe (2004:272-275).

⁶ Joachim Schaper, in his article on "The Temple Treasury Committee in the Times of Nehemiah and Ezra", observes that in the Ancient Middle East it was a common practice that the temple did not only serve as a place of worship, but also as a storehouse. From this perspective, Schaper commented, "We can therefore conclude the Jerusalem temple collected and administered not just 'holy' taxes, as Spiro puts it, but also 'secular' taxes" (1997:204). In this case, it is argued that the Achaemenid rulers applied the strategy of returning their subjects to their homeland and encouraged them to rebuild their national shrines which became means of income.

⁷ The term canonical here implies the recognized biblical text by the Christian Church.

⁸ It is held among historians and biblical scholars that the modern literature and the canonical interpretation about the involvement of the Persian rulers in religious affairs of Yehuda is somehow an exaggeration. Grabbe (2004:215) commented, "In actual practice the Persians continued what was already general policy in the Near Eastern empires: to declare their personal piety in their inscriptions – of how they were diligent to obey their god(s) and follow his (their) will (the inscriptions of Babylonian and Assyrian rulers are filled with these – the Persians are hardly unique); to give precedent to their own state and/or personal royal cults; to tolerate local cults as long as they did not threaten insubordination".

⁹ Kessler (2008:129).

the Lord God of Israel. Having determined the central theme of the unit, the question which has to be addressed still remains – how does the abolition of intermarriage in Ezra 10 fit into this theme? To put it differently, what is the relationship between the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem and the divorce of the foreign women which resulted in sending them away together with their offspring? One way of addressing this question would be to consider the composition of this unit – Ezra 1-6, as well as to identify the ultimate role of the temple in the postexilic community.

Again in chapter two of this study, it has been highlighted that the entire book of Ezra is a composition of different documents. In recognition of this phenomenon, Japhet stated that “Although in its final form Ezra 1-6 constitute a single continuous unit, the material contained within it may be classified into two categories: documents (lists, letters imperial documents, etc.), and a historical narrative which provides the sequence into which the documents are integrated” (1991:198). This piece of information helps one understand that some parts of this unit were documents that already existed and the author/editor brought them together to make one document. According to Japhet, the first category – the already existing material includes the Cyrus edict, an inventory of Temple articles, a short narrative about free will offering, the settlement of the returnees, the building of the altar, the laying of the foundation of the temple and the reinstatement of the temple offices (1-3). The second category of material is the narrative given by the author/editor about the whole process of rebuilding the altar and the Temple. This includes the opposition from the peoples of the land, the resuming of the reconstruction of the Temple, its completion and dedication and the institution of the Passover (chapters 4-6). One of the concerns biblical scholars have about these two types of material is how they relate to each other, particularly with regard to the imperial decrees – one authored by Cyrus and the other by Darius.

According to the canonical text, the Lord, God of Israel, had appointed Cyrus to build His temple in Jerusalem. However, Cyrus could not go and do the work personally; instead, he used his political powers to free the exiles with the condition that they would go up to Jerusalem and build the temple on his behalf. He issued the edict, which reads, “Anyone of his people among you – may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who lives in Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:3). Many of the exiles responded to Cyrus’ appeal and migrated to Jerusalem, while others chose to remain in Babylon and fulfill a moral obligation – to support economically those

who went to do the rebuilding, because the edict had included that “The people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver, and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offering for the temple of God in Jerusalem” (1:4). The expression “אִשְׁרֵי הַיָּגוּרִים” (in NIV translated as “the people of any place where survivors may be living”) seems to refer to those who had decided to remain in the diaspora, particularly in the Babylonian territory. In other words, for Cyrus, all those who were taken into captivity to Babylon that were identified as “Israel, Judah and Benjamin, the people of Judah, Jews, or exiles”¹⁰ were to be involved in this divine project – the rebuilding of the temple. In fact, that represented the main reason for their going back to Jerusalem, as it is well stated, “Cyrus therefore turns to the Judean exiles in his kingdom and grants them three rights, the chief of which is permission to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem” (Japhet, 1991:201). In this case, it is fair to conclude that the addressee of Cyrus edict were all the exiles in Babylon.

As to the recipient of the Darius decree introduced in 6:3-5, scholars differ in their opinions. Some argue that in the first place Darius does not explicitly identify his addressees. In his edict, in comparison with the Cyrus decree, Darius is more generic than one would expect. Darius starts by saying “Let the temple be built as a place to present sacrifices, and let the foundations be laid...” (6:3b). In this case, Darius’ addressee is unidentified, and that can mean that the call for the building of the temple was given to all the people living in Jerusalem and Judah, as Japhet stated, “We must conclude, therefore, that the people of Judah, the inhabitants of the land, are the ones permitted to build the Temple” (1991:209). Another group of scholars contended that Darius had clearly identified his receptor. They argue that after giving the measurements of the temple, Darius drew a plan for a proper funding which would be adequate for the completion of the temple. Then he moved on to define the people who would be responsible for funding it and those who would do the actual rebuilding. Unlike Cyrus, in the Darius edict it is not all the returnees who are entrusted to the rebuilding of the temple. Instead, “Darius forbade interference and only required public funding of the project” (Matzal, 2000:567). The entire funding for the ninety feet high and ninety feet wide temple will have to be provided by the royal treasury (6:4, 8); the money had

¹⁰ Mallau (1988:75) describes the returnees in these terms.

to come from the peoples' taxes, in provincial governor's repository. In this case, the funding is no longer a moral obligation, but a public and socio-political duty which involves all the inhabitants. As to who is assigned to rebuild the temple, it reads: "Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this house of God on its site" (6:7). Now it is not the whole group of the returnees in charge of the reconstruction. Instead, it is a selected group – the elders of the Jews. The governing body of Trans-Euphrates was given the responsibility to finance the project, through public taxes, while the elders of the Jews did the building. In short, up to this point this study has maintained that the central theme of the first unit of Ezra's writings is the temple. Though they differ on the receptor's perspectives (Cyrus being somehow inclusive while Darius exclusive), both edicts stressed the point that it was a must that the temple in Jerusalem be built. That was the main reason for the exiles' returning to their homeland – to rebuild the temple. And now the question remains: what does the temple have to do with the abolition of intermarriages?

It has been repeatedly mentioned that the Babylonian experience meant not only a geographical removal of the people of Israel, but it mainly meant a loss of identity. One major aspect of the Israelites' identity was the temple. Becking said it boldly that "The temple was very important for the religious identity of post-exilic Judaism. The temple gave them a home to gather and to worship YHWH in a world where other religions and other forms of Yahwism were present" (2011:36). In Psalms 137, the Psalmist reports that when the people of Israel were taken into exile in Babylon, one day they were by the rivers of Babylon seated and weeping, as they remembered Zion. Still in that mood, their captors asked them to sing joyous songs, and they replied that they could not sing the songs of the Lord in a foreign land. Now having come back to Zion, it was their highest aim to get rid of any foreign influence and have the Lord in His fullness, and the centre of this experience was the Temple, as Breneman said it well, "The temple was vital to the Jewish community, for it was a symbol of God's presence and a reminder that they were to be 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation'" (1993:53). In this case, the presence of "foreign" people around the place of the Holy One was seen as a great risk for the people of Yahweh. There is no need of repeating what has been said about the biblical meaning of the concept foreign. It is mentioned in the previous chapter that in the context of the Second Temple Judean

community, this term carries in itself the concept of idolatry¹¹. Those who were identified as foreigners lived an idolatrous life, and the reason for sending them away is here stated by Curcio who explains that, “Based on the lack of a long-term success of the royal reform, in which the method was to destroy the foreign cults in the land, Ezra’s approach was to rid the Temple community of foreign relations so as to avoid the temptation to worship their foreign gods. Ezra’s belief that the survival of God’s ‘holy seed’ depended on living apart from the foreign people, even if that meant their own wives and children, impelled him to such extreme measures” (2010:172). In short, the possible answer to the question above is that because the Temple of Yahweh and all in it and around it is holy, all that is abomination has to be driven away. Now we move to the next point – Ezra 10 in relation to Ezra 7-9.

3.5. Ezra 10 in Relation to Ezra 7-9

Ezra 7-10 is known as the second unit of Ezra’s writings¹², and like in the first unit, it is appropriate to start this discussion with a search for its theme. Although it has been agreed that the writings of Ezra are a composition of different sources, it is always important to acknowledge that the editor’s main purpose, when he brought those sources together, was to make it one book, which would be read as a unit. Scholars, who read the book of Ezra in this way, such as Levering (2007:31), have suggested that the overall theme of the book is ‘The struggle to build the temple’ in the Promised Land and not elsewhere. Levering went on to say that there are three key elements in Yahweh’s promise to the Israelites, namely, people, land and temple. In his argument he stated that, “Land without temple loses its meaning; temple outside the land loses its purpose... the return to the land, therefore, is not a mere geographical journey: it is a new exodus that can be fulfilled only when the people arrive at a new temple where once again the Lord’s Passover can be celebrated” (2007:34). At this point, according to Ezra 1-6, the people had recovered the Promised Land, settled in it, reconstructed and dedicated the temple, and reinstated all temple offices, sacrifices and festivals (including the Passover festival). If all these elements have taken place, and if Levering’s proposition about the general theme of Ezra’s writings is acceptable among biblical students, then what was the major motive for Ezra’s mission to Jerusalem? An

¹¹ In chapter two above, this topic has been significantly covered. Biblical scholars are in common agreement that the central issue about foreign women in Ezra-Nehemiah’s writings was nothing else but idolatry. Those women were living a life of abomination. For full discussion, see chapter 2.

¹² A full discussion is in chapter 2 above.

answer to this question has already emerged in the course of this study¹³, and here are also three scholars who are in complete agreement in their analysis of the topic. First, Weanzana argues that the main purpose of Ezra's mission to Jerusalem was to make sure that the returnees knew and observed the Law of Moses, when he wrote, "Ezra's main tasks are as follows: to inspect Judah and Jerusalem to see that the people there were obeying God's law..." (2006:541). Second, Brown (2009:220) asserts that "This section's emphasis on the role of the returnees' conduct in their relationship with Yahweh qualifies the hope generated in chapters 1-6." In other words, God's promise through the prophetic voices such as Jeremiah 29:11, who prophesied "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and future", and Jeremiah 30:3 which says "The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from the captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess..." For these promises to come to their fulfillment, it all depended on how the people of Israel were keeping themselves in good relationship with Yahweh. For that reason, Ezra had to go to Jerusalem to ensure that the Israelites were people of the law and, therefore, there was no idolatry among them. Deuteronomy 6:4 "יהוה אחד שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו" (Hear, O Israel: The Lord your God, the Lord is one). Lastly, in agreement with the other two scholars above, Lee commented that, "Furthermore, the principal agenda of Ezra's visit to Judah was foremost concerned with the regulation of the cult in Jerusalem" (2011:177).

In fact, this is what we read in the canonical text. The author introduces chapters 7-10 with a full description of Ezra and his major mission to Jerusalem. After a significantly long genealogical description in 7:1-6 the author identifies Ezra as a "כֹּהֵן" (priest), a descendant of Aaron the high priest, and "סֹפֵר" (scribe/teacher). Some commentators defend the position that it was for that reason that King Artaxerxes¹⁴ commissioned Ezra הכֹּהֵן והסֹפֵר (Priest and Scribe) to go to Jerusalem "to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard בְּדַת אֱלֹהֶיךָ (to the law of your God). However, there is a dispute among biblical commentators with regard

¹³ In the first chapter, this study mentioned that though everything was in place with regard to continuity between the pre and postexilic communities, something as important as the temple and worship was missing in the new community – the knowledge and obedience to the Law of Moses.

¹⁴ As to which Artaxerxes, it was an issue of chronology. The majority of scholars suggest that it might be Artaxerxes I who is said to have reigned in 465-424 B.C. However, it is still problematic, as Myers (1965:59-60) commented that, "one's adherence to one or the other date would naturally affect somewhat the interpretation of the context of the work of Ezra in general and this chapter in particular".

to Ezra's scribal role in Babylon. Some argue that Ezra played an important political role under the Persian government. Myers, for instance, stated, "That Ezra occupied an important position cannot be doubted, since he was entrusted with a special mission by the king (vs. 14). He appears to have had political as well as religious responsibilities" (1965:60). This position is also advocated by Weanzana, as she complemented, "During the Era of the new temple, when there was no royal dynasty, high priests played an important political role at the heart of the community... The priests exercised executive and judicial powers and were leaders and judges of the observance of the Law of Moses" (2006:540). Other scholars avoid involving Ezra in political issues and insist that he received the scribal title from his fellow Jews. It is possible that Ezra was one of those who started a scribal school where תורה (Law) was copied from old to new material and interpreted into contemporary situations¹⁵. Being a scribe and at the same time a priest, Ezra would be the right person to go to Jerusalem and teach the people of the promise, who lived in the Promised Land, to obey the God they worshiped in the holy temple. In short, whether Ezra was a political figure in the Persian Empire, or only an expert teacher and interpreter of the Law of Moses, or both, the conclusion proposed in this study is that, according to the canonical text, Ezra went to Jerusalem to teach the Law of Moses and make sure that the returnees obeyed it. Even though the people and the temple were already in the land, one more important element was missing – the observance of the Law. The Lord God of Israel said in Exodus 19:5-6a, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"; in Leviticus 26:11-12 "I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people"; and 11:45b "therefore וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי (be holy, because I am holy). With regards to Ezra, Myers puts it as follows: "He was, like Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, and Nehemiah, charged with a task he carried out with zeal. He was accompanied by a contingent of Israelites (ordinary folk) and religious personnel, which indicated his primary interests – to promote the religious aspects

¹⁵ Holmgren is one of those who avoid seeing Ezra as a politician. Holmgren is of the opinion that the exiles did not continue with their worshiping system because they did not have any place for such a holy event. According to him, "They were unable to perform many of their priestly functions because no temple existed there, but they were able to continue their ancient role as interpreters of Torah" (1987:56). This opinion is seconded by the Psalmist who recorded, "How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?" (Ps. 137:4), and also by Levering who pointed out, "Temple outside the land loses its purpose..." (2007:34).

of the Jerusalem community” (1965:61). Ezra’s mission therefore was to restore holiness in the Promised Land to the people of the promise¹⁶. From here we can consider Ezra 10 and its relationship with Ezra’s mission: “It is the Torah that guides the postexilic community to divorce their foreign wives (10:3) and to banish certain aliens from Israel” (Lasor, Hubbard and Bush, 2003:564). The people of Israel had recovered the Promised Land and retained the heart of their identity – the temple, which marked God’s presence in their midst; they had reinstated the worship system with all the sacrifices and temple offices, but they were not yet a holy nation until the time Ezra took the Law of God to them. It was the Torah which reminded them about what Yahweh had promised to them, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6a). So, it may be appropriate to suggest that from the biblical point of view, the Temple and the Torah are the two parallel forces that caused the divorce of the foreign wives in Ezra 10.

3.6. The Editorial Influences in Ezra 7-10

Like other biblical criticisms, Redaction Criticism is a vast field in biblical studies. For that reason, this study will narrow its scope to focus on Artaxerxes’ edict, and the three major editorial voices, namely scribal, golah, and the priestly or Levitical to see how all these have influenced Ezra 10. First, Pakkala has observed that the canonical version of Artaxerxes’ edict contradicts the original mission of Ezra, which was to restore holiness in the land. When the original text is read in view of the previous 6 chapters, one can see a logical connection between the two units. The returnees have settled in the land, they have rebuilt the temple and re-established the worship system, but they did not have the knowledge of the Law of God. Moreover, it makes sense from the point that the list of the returnees in Ezra 2 indicates the presence of almost all the temple officers (priests, Levites, singers, temple servants) except scribes, the ones who had the task of interpreting and teaching the Law. As already mentioned above, all the necessary elements for the fulfillment of the promise were in place, but there was no holiness in the land. The people of Israel, including the priests had abandoned the Lord God of the promise and welcomed idolatry and abomination in their lives

¹⁶ Levering (2007:81).

and homes. Therefore, whether the account about Ezra and his journey to Jerusalem could be regarded as historically true or not, the point is that the time had come that a scribe like Ezra had to step in and teach the Torah of Yahweh. Scholars such as Holmgren (1987) have argued that the term law is a literal translation of Torah, and it sometimes communicates less effectively than the real meaning of the Law of which Ezra was an expert of and subsequently had taken to Jerusalem. According to Holmgren, to understand the postexilic term “law”, from the postmodern point of view is misleading. Biblical scholars have noted that most of the Hebrew words are difficult to translate into our modern language, and the word תורה is one of them. This study, however, does not intend to discuss this topic at length, but simply to indicate that some possible meanings that are commonly linked to the concept of תורה are law, directions, teachings, and instructions. The last one is regarded to be the closest to the true meaning of the concept תורה in the context of the intended recipients of the Second Temple community. Divine instruction is the true definition of the document that Ezra had a high level of understanding not only in knowledge but also in lifestyle¹⁷. Holmgren noted: “It is true, of course, that Torah is Law, but it is the law of the covenant; it is the Law for people who already are in relationship with God. Therefore, Torah is more than Law; it is teaching or instruction for a people whom God has delivered and called to be his own” (1987:57).

Second, Pakkala (2004:40) continues to argue that not all what we have in the canonical¹⁸ version of Artaxerxes’ edict was in the original document. The original text of the rescript is comprised of verses 12 to 16, then 19 to 22. This means that verses 17, 18 and 23 – 26 are late additions. The following table attempts to compare the two texts to see how it looked like before and after the editorial activities.

¹⁷ Janice (2010:169) argues that the understanding of the whole reason for the Law is intended to be teaching, instructing, or making God’s relationship with his people understood, which results in bringing a reform/transformation in the lives of the people. Becking (2011:47) also supports the idea that for Ezra the תורה was not an issue of intellectual but a life transformation. So even in practical life, what mostly transforms life is not what we know about the law, or what the law says, but rather the instruction process which helps people to practice whatever the content of the law in their respective context.

¹⁸ The term canonical here implies the recognized biblical text by the Christian Church.

Before the editorial activity (Original)

12 Artaxerxes, king of kings,

To Ezra, a teacher of the Law of the God of heaven:

Greetings.

13 Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom, including priests and Levites, who wish to go to Jerusalem with you may go.

14 You are sent by the king and his seven advisers to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God, which is in your hand.

15 Moreover, you are to take with you the silver and gold that the king and his advisers have freely given to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem,

16 together with all the silver and gold you may obtain from the provinces of Babylon, as well as the freewill offerings of the people and priests for the temple of their God in Jerusalem.

19 Deliver to the God of Jerusalem all the articles entrusted to you for worship in the temple of your God.

20 And anything else needed for the temple of your God that you may have occasion to supply, you may provide from the royal treasury.

21 Now I, King Artaxerxes, order all the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates to provide with diligence whatever Ezra the priest, a

After the editorial activity (Canonical)

12 Artaxerxes, king of kings,

To Ezra, a teacher of the Law of the God of heaven:

Greetings.

13 Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom, including priests and Levites, who wish to go to Jerusalem with you may go.

14 You are sent by the king and his seven advisers to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God, which is in your hand.

15 Moreover, you are to take with you the silver and gold that the king and his advisers have freely given to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem,

16 together with all the silver and gold you may obtain from the provinces of Babylon, as well as the freewill offerings of the people and priests for the temple of their God in Jerusalem.

17 With this money be sure to buy bulls, rams, and male lambs, together with their grain offerings and drink offering, and sacrifice them on the altar of the temple of your God in Jerusalem.

18 You and your brother Jews may then do whatever seems best with the rest of the silver and gold, in accordance with the will of your God.

19 Deliver to the God of Jerusalem all the articles entrusted to you for worship in the temple of your God.

20 And anything else needed for the temple of your God that you may have occasion to supply, you may provide from the royal treasury.

21 Now I, King Artaxerxes, order all the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates to provide with diligence whatever Ezra the priest, a

teacher of the Law of the God of heaven,
may ask of you –
22 up to hundred talents of liver, a hundred
cors of wheat, a hundred baths of wine, a
hundred baths of olive oil, and salt without
limit.

teacher of the Law of the God of heaven,
may ask of you –
22 up to hundred talents of liver, a hundred
cors of wheat, a hundred baths of wine, a
hundred baths of olive oil, and salt without
limit.

23 Whatever the God of heaven has
prescribed, let it be done with diligence for
the temple of the God of heaven. Why
should there be wrath against the realm of
the king and his sons?

24 You are also to know that you have no
authority to impose taxes, tribute or duty
on any of the priests, Levites, singers,
gatekeepers, temple servants or other
workers at this house of God.

25 And you, Ezra, in accordance with the
wisdom of your God which you possess,
appoint magistrates and judges to
administer justice to all the people of
Trans-Euphrates – all who know the laws
of your God. And you are to teach any who
do not know them.

26 Whoever does not obey the law of your
God and the law of the king must surely be
punished by death, banishment,
confiscation of property, or imprisonment.

When this document is read in its final form, the logical connection between the two units dies off. The theme shifts from teaching of the Law to the administration of the province and the temple. In other words, Ezra seems to drop away his religious responsibilities, “You are sent by the king and his seven advisers to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God, which is in your hand” (7:14) and to load himself with political and administrative powers, “And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates – all who know the laws of your God. And you are to teach any who do not know them. Whoever does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king must surely be punished by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment” (7:25-26). It is from this understanding that Pakkala pointed out, “He was increasingly regarded as a hero who was gradually attributed more and more functions and deeds” (2004:73). Moreover, Pakkala argues that the canonical document sounds more Jewish than Achaemenid. As one

reads the whole rescript, many questions start popping into mind, such as why would the Achaemenid rulers seem to be very much concerned about the details of what Ezra should buy for the temple sacrifices: “With this money be sure to buy bulls, rams, male lambs, grain and drink offering and sacrifice them on the altar of the temple of your God in Jerusalem” (7:17)? This is another indication of a shift mentioned above from the temple reconstruction to temple worship. Another question that might come into one’s mind is what was the purpose of such an absolute freedom given to Ezra and his fellow Jews to do whatever seemed best with the imperial donation: “You and your brother Jews may then do whatever seems best with the rest of the silver and gold in accordance with the will of your God” (7:18). Were there no magistrates and judges to administer in the Province of Trans-Euphrates before the arrival of Ezra to the point that the king had to grant him with all the power and authority to appoint such officials, after approximately fifty years of settlement in the land (7:25)? Again, it is stated below that there is another shift of focus from the majority *golah* to the minority people of the temple – the priests/Levites who later were in charge of both religious and political matters, as Grabbe put it correctly: “Whatever the exact function of the chief priest under the Judahite kings, the loss of the monarchy and the incorporation of Judah into the Persian empire created a completely new situation. All the evidence indicates that the office of the high priest expanded in importance over a period of time to fill the gap of local leadership, even though there was a provincial governor appointed by the Persians” (2004:231). In the process of going through all these and other questions, a reader of this document might not have any choice but first, to accept the fact that a great part of Ezra’s text has experienced heavy editorial work¹⁹; then consider the possibility that the primary intention of the editor(s) was to let his/their audience know that it was not about Cyrus’ edict or Artaxerxes’ rescript, but it was about Yahweh who was acting to fulfill His divine plans, “The true King of kings demonstrates His sovereignty by employing Artaxerxes’ hubris to accomplish His own purposes” (Brown, 2009:125).

Moreover, by editorial influences, this study refers to different voices in Ezra’s writings starting from the time of collection of various sources up to the final redaction – the canonical text. The first voice which can be identified in these writings is that of the scribe. Scholars such as Dor (2003:26) and Breneman (1993: 41) have observed that, in one way or another,

¹⁹ See Pakkala (2004:22) for full discussion.

an individual or school from a scribal perspective had been involved in the process of collecting and compiling the different sources (letters, imperial documents, inventories, lists of people) into one book, the book of Ezra. This remark is based on the fact that one of the strengths of a scribe is the capacity of acquiring knowledge about official documents and their respective location. In this case, the scribal editor knew about the existence of all these documents which are found in the text, as Mallau commented, “The redactor presents himself as a learned man. He is acquainted with a fair number of documents. He knows where documents are archived” (1988:79). The editor, for instance, knew that there were documents about the rebellious city of Jerusalem, and they were archived in the king’s palace in Babylon. The enemies of the returnees pointed out these documents to the king in order to support their argument, when they wrote, “Now since we are under the obligation to the palace and it is not proper for us to see the king dishonored, we are sending this message to inform the king, so that a search may be made in the archives of your predecessors. In these records you will find that this city is a rebellious city, troublesome to kings and provinces, a place of rebellion from ancient time. That is why this city was destroyed” (4:14-15). The sentence “You will find that this city is a rebellious city, troublesome to king and provinces...” gives enough evidence that the editor was confident of the existence of such document. In his turn, the king replied by confirming that a search had been made and such documents were indeed found, “The letter you sent us has been read and translated in my presence, I issued an order and a search was made, and it was found that this city has a long history of revolt against kings and has been a place of rebellion and sedition” (4:18-19). Another example is found in Tattenai’s letter to King Darius. The canonical text reports that the rebuilding of the temple had resumed after the prophets Haggai and Zachariah had prophesied to the returnees and encouraged them to reconsider first things which belong to God. When the provincial authorities (Tattenai, Shetar-Bazenai and their associates) heard that the rebuilding of the temple had recommenced, they went to find out who had given the authorization. In this encounter between the governors and the elders of the Jews, the editor does not say anything about the answer given by the elders of the Jews, when they were questioned, “Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and restore this structure?” (5:3b). Instead, the editor decided to insert the answer of the elders in Tattenai and his associates’ letter to Darius. At this point, the editor seems to have enough knowledge about Cyrus edict, though he puts this knowledge in the mouth of the elders of the Jews (5:11-16). It is here where Mallau is right when addressing ‘A theology of scribes’, and he wrote, “He knows

where documents are archived. He is aware of the fact that literary documents play a decisive role in political decisions. He has learned that those who know how to present the right documents have a tremendous influence upon the decisions of the mighty” (1988:79). This is the case with the scribal editor in Ezra’s writings. He was able to present the right documents at the right time to the right people in order to make his point.

Another voice which can be identified in the writings of Ezra is that of the golah editor²⁰. According to Pakkala, a close reading of Ezra 1-6 will show a progressive transition from one perspective to another. He commented: “On the basis of Ezra 6:16-22, one can sketch a development that gradually increased the importance of the Gola community and that ended up in denying the existence of the non-Gola Palestinian Jewry altogether” (2004:263). The first part of Ezra (1-3) is predominantly a golah approach. The editor had a clear understanding that the prophetic message had been fulfilled when Cyrus came to power over the Mediterranean region. He wrote, “In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing” (Ezra 1:1), and the direct beneficiaries of this prophecy were all those who had been exiled to Babylon. This is demonstrated in Cyrus’ proclamation which says, “מכל-עמו” (of all His people). As indicated above, the גולה (golah) editor states explicitly the reason why Cyrus issued this decree; he had a divine duty to go up to Judah and build the temple of God of Israel who lives in Jerusalem. However, for some reasons, he could not go and do the work by himself. He then commissioned all the exiles to go and build the temple on his behalf. In the process of responding to this call, the exiles were divided into two groups, but each group took part in the rebuilding of the temple. Those who had migrated to Jerusalem, in response to Cyrus’ appeal, were physically involved in the building, while those who had decided to remain in Babylon were commanded to support the project financially/economically²¹. Moreover, in Ezra 3, the גולה (golah) editor states it clearly that as soon as the בני גלורתא (children of the

²⁰ The golah editor on one hand puts more emphasis on the great value of all the returnees. They are the people of the promise, the true children of Abraham, and the ones commissioned by Cyrus to go up to Jerusalem and build the temple of Yahweh, God of Israel. The Levitical editor on the other hand shifts the emphasis from the returnees as a whole to the small group of the temple people – the priests and Levites.

²¹ Ezra 1:4

exile)²² got settled in their respective towns, they became one person, which means they had one common goal and, perhaps, one mind. Under the leadership of Jeshua and Zerubbabel, they started and finished the rebuilding of the altar, instituted all the sacrificial ceremonies, which involved the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, burnt offering, sacrifices of New Moon and other feasts for the Lord. When the foundation of the temple was done, they instituted the temple offices, and “All the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid” (Ezra 3:11). At this stage the editor’s focus was on the continuity between the pre and the postexilic communities.²³

The third voice identified in Ezra’s writings is that of the Levites/priests. The writings of Ezra, in this case, tend to exclude the majority of the golah community in favor of the minority people of the temple – the priests and Levites. In fact in addressing this topic, Pakkala wrote, “After the Gola expansion, the text was transmitted in Levitical circles. The editors of this phase are Levites, closely connected or associated with priestly cycles. They represent general and various interests of the temple, priests and Levites” (2004:266). This comment takes us back to what has already been said above about the decree issued by Darius. In this edict, the temple is entrusted only to the elders of the Jews, as it reads in Ezra 6:7b, “פחת יהודיא ולשבי יהויא בית־אלהא רך יבנון אל־אתרה” (Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild the house of God on its site), though during the dedication of the temple and the Passover celebration in chapter 6:16, 19 respectively, the editor gives us an impression that the rest of the returnees were also included. If one were to look carefully at the Hebrew script above, he/she would discover something strange in its grammatical construction. In chapter two, this study has mentioned that the proper word order in Biblical Hebrew is V-S-O. Here, the case is quite different. Though a free translation of the rescript starts with “Let”, the word order verb, subject and object is ignored; instead, it is S-O-V. This is what is called ‘Marked Word Order’, and its function in this context is to mark the focus; to focus on the identity of who must build the בית־אלהא (the house of God). In this case, it is the יהודיא ולשבי יהודיא (Governor of the Jews and Elders of the Jews). Moreover, it has been said earlier in this study that there is also a rhetorical genre implied in Ezra’s text. This

²² It has been indicated that the term “children of Israel” at least the Ezra-Nehemiah’s writings refers mainly to the exiles, and those who had not been in exile are referred to as the “peoples of the land”.

²³ Pakkala (2004:263) gives more details.

is mainly from the Levitical/priestly editor. The selection of words and expressions attributed to Tattenai, the governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates can be from a well-informed Levite or priest. First, the adversaries of the elders of the Jews seemed to be very positive and respectful of the rebuilding of the temple, when in their appealing letter to Darius they said in 5:8, “The king should know that we went to the district of Judah, לבית אלהא רבא (to the house of the great God). Second, the adversaries identify the elders of the Jewish in 5:11 as the “עבדוהי די-אלה שמיא וארעא” (servants of the God of heaven and earth). In other words, the editor knew exactly what was in the mind of his personages, and his selection of terms was to emphasize the importance of those around the temple. These are the ones taking over the leadership. One of the clear examples of the leadership shift from the general golah to the priestly elite group is in relation to the crisis of intermarriage. The text gives an impression that this problem was handled by the leading priests and Levites, as it reads, “A proclamation was then issued throughout Judah and Jerusalem for all the exiles to assemble in Jerusalem. Anyone who failed to appear within three days would forfeit his property, in accordance with the decision of the officials and elders...” (Ezra 10:7-8). In his analysis of chapter 3 Pakkala argues that, “Although the text may be partly corrupted, it seems probable that vv. 8 b and 9b were later added in order to replace the original supervisors of the temple construction with the Levites” (2004:270). In short, by the end of this book the people of the temple (the priests and Levites) were the dominant voice.

To conclude, this section has attempted to show that in addition to the two forces (temple and Torah), the editorial elements have also played a great role for the implementation of the ideology in chapter 10. Starting with the Artaxerxes document, it has been indicated that the later changes contributed significantly to the emerging of the decision making group. In this case, when the crisis of intermarriage was reported in Ezra 9, the decision makers followed exactly what the modified version of the Artaxerxes document had commanded – property confiscation and expulsion of those who would disobey the orders (7:26 and 10:7-8, respectively). Schaper commented that these modes of punishment were not from the book of divine instruction – Torah. “And the Persian rescript cited in Ezra 7:26 may provide a juridical bases for this action” (1997:357-348). The same seems to be true with the progression of the editorial phases in Ezra’s writings. The term progression does not necessarily mean a chronological order of the editing stages, but in terms of canonical order. The shift from the scribal to golah then to priestly or Levitical editorial traditions gave a

remarkable influence to Ezra 10; there is a logical move towards the protection of the temple from idolatry through observance of the Law. Now the question which may arise is as to when the Law was taught. This leads us then to the last point.

3.7. Ezra 10 in the context of the Nehemiah writings

In section 3.6 above it is mentioned that the major purpose of Ezra's journey to Jerusalem was to enquire about the law of the Lord God of Israel; to ensure that those who had returned and settled in the Promised Land about fifty years before and became the worshipers of the Holy One and walked in holiness as He is holy²⁴. In addressing the question as to what did this mission have to do with Ezra 10 – the dismissal of intermarriages, it has been argued in that the term foreign did not necessarily mean status of nationality or ethnicity, but it mainly referred to those who worshipped other gods rather than Yahweh²⁵; they were foreigners in relation to the kingdom of priests and the holy nation. The returnees seemed to be ignorant of this truth and lived a life of abomination until the time Ezra took the law to them. With an assumption that Ezra 10 was a direct outcome of the knowledge of the law, one of the many questions asked by biblical scholars is when Ezra actually taught the law to the people. One must, however, consider that there is not even a single hint in the entire book of Ezra that Ezra the scribe ever did it. In an attempt to answer this question, Old Testament students tend to focus on Ezra's memoirs, which are found in the book of Nehemiah, specifically chapter 8. In this chapter it is explicitly mentioned that Ezra read the Law of Moses, "So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate" (Neh. 8:2-3). This is the topic which will be addressed in the following paragraphs. However, before that, we will attend to the two most crucial elements of similarities between Ezra and Nehemiah's writings, namely structure and context.

²⁴ "Now as you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6). "I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground. I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy" (Leviticus 19:44-45).

²⁵ See a full discussion in chapter 2.4.3 of this study.

As far as structural and contextual features are concerned, it is observed that there is a lot in common between these two books. For example, Levering said, “The outline of the book of Nehemiah mirrors that of the book of Ezra. Both books begin with preparation for return to the land. The first 6 chapters of both books are devoted to building what the Babylonians destroyed. The second part of both books is dominated by Ezra the scribe, a priest in the Aaronian line” (2007:117). Let us have a look at this and other structural and contextual features in the table below.

Contextual and structural similarities	Ezra	Nehemiah
The list of the returnees	2:1-70	7:6-72
The building of the altar, temple (Ezra) and the walls (Nehemiah)	3:7-13	3:1-32
The opposition from the enemies	4:1-5:1-17	4:1-23
Completion of the temple (Ezra) and of walls (Nehemiah), respectively	6:13-15	6:15-19
Both Ezra and Nehemiah were sent by the King of Persia	7:11-26	2:11-9
The recognition of God’s everlasting love and mercy	9:5-15	9:5-36
The confession of the people’s sins	10:1	9:1-4
The taking of the oath for the abolition of intermarriages	10:5	13:25
The dismissal of intermarriages	10:9-17	13:23-31

What Levering has pointed out is that in terms of structure both books share the same perspectives. A close look at the table above, one will notice that both Ezra’s and Nehemiah’s narratives move from one place in the same direction with the same mission – the return of the exiles from Babylon to their homeland. Time had come for the restoration of Israel. In one way or another, both books are about people, land, temple, walls of the City of Jerusalem and the Law of Moses. While Ezra was called to take care of the peoples’ spiritual demands (temple and the Law of Moses), Nehemiah responded to their physical essentials (the reconstruction of the walls for both social and economic security). Of course, this is an

indication that God looks after His peoples' needs holistically and equally. Because of this parallelism between Ezra's and Nehemiah's writings, Levering concluded, "Since the books of Ezra and Nehemiah share so much in terms of content and structure, the commentary on Nehemiah necessarily covers similar grounds as that of the commentary on Ezra" (2007:118).

With regard to the context, the table above also has attempted to demonstrate how much these two books have in common. Because of this commonality, the question of one or different authors remains unanswered. For example, the two lists, one in Ezra 2 and the other in Nehemiah 7 are still under dispute. It is argued that if these lists are from different authors, either one copied from the other, or it is an initiative of the final editor. On the one hand, some scholars still maintain the theory of single editor; the chronicler is the one responsible for all these similarities. Breneman (1993:39-40), in his analysis of Ezra and Nehemiah memoirs (EM and NM), indicated that similarities found in these two literary works have mostly to do with the final editor. This approach is supported by Myers who stated, "It has been shown fairly conclusively that the Ezra Memoirs present the same linguistic and literary characteristics found elsewhere in the work of the Chronicler... In this view of stylistic it is difficult to dissociate the Ezra material (Ezra 8-10, including Neh. 8-10) from the work of the Chronicler" (1965:Li). On the other hand, another group of academics, although with different opinions, support the hypothesis of different authors. In this assumption, some scholars such as Kurt Galling defend that Nehemiah might be the original source from which Ezra took the information and applied it to his context²⁶. This position is also defended by Frevel and Conczorowski when they observed that Nehemiah's exogamy traditions in Nehemiah 13 is parallel to the Deuteronomistic one in Numbers 25. Both Nehemiah and Numbers focus on priestly purity which seems to be an earlier tradition than that of Ezra which puts more emphasis on the "holy seed" of the Golah. Frevel and Conczorowski's conclusion is that Nehemiah's text might be older than Ezra's, as it is stated, "These observations lead Frevel and Conczorowski to a relative dating of Nehemiah 13 before Ezra 9-10" (Jonker, 2014:11). Others side themselves with Pakkala to advocate the opposite, as he

²⁶ Kurt Galling (1951:151) approaches this issue in relation to the difference between Ezra 2:68-70 and Nehemiah 7:70-72. The point here is that Nehemiah was aware of the temple construction and for that reason he included bowls into the list of free gift. Moreover, Galling suggested that the author of Ezra has already had given the list of the inventory of the utensils in chapter 1, and therefore there was no need of repeating it in chapter 2. So, the conclusion arrived here is that the original text of Ezra did not have this list. The author of Ezra took it from Nehemiah and omitted what he already had in his previous chapter.

points out, “Regardless of these problems, some differences clearly imply that Ezra 2 is the original version” (2004:137). This is to say that while we treat the two books differently, it is equally important to accept their unbreakable unity. If Williamson’s²⁷ final judgment on this topic is accepted, then Ezra 10 fits well in the context of Nehemiah’s writings. In fact, as it is indicated in the table above, Nehemiah 13:23-31 gives proof that in fact this incident took place in the Second Temple Judean community. This is the point we are turning to – the original place of Nehemiah 8 and its relationship to Ezra 9-10.

Ezra, in particular, does not give any background of why the issue of intermarriage was brought up to him, and then from there on it becomes the dominant topic in his missionary agenda in Jerusalem. He introduces the topic simply by stating “After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, ‘The peoples of Israel, including the priests and the Levites have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring...’” (9:1a). What did the author mean by “these things”? In trying to answer this question, biblical scholars have suggested that Nehemiah 8 and probably 9 and 10 are part of Ezra’s memoir (EM). The term “After these things” refers to the reading of the law. Pakkala has outlined several arguments to support this point²⁸. First, he argues that the text has self-evidence that Ezra is the principal actor and Nehemiah plays a secondary role, as it reads from the canonical text, “So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand... Ezra the scribe stood on the high wooden platform built for the occasion” (Neh. 8:2-4a). In view of all this, Pakkala concluded, “In the final text, Nehemiah is a late intruder, which implies that the chapter originally had another context independent of the NM” (2004:168). The second argument is thematically based. Nehemiah 8 connects well thematically to Ezra 7-10, because the theme of this section, as mentioned somewhere above, is “to enquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God, which is in your hand” (Ezra 7:14b). Pakkala observed that to support that the original place of Nehemiah 8 is where it is presently found would mean ignoring

²⁷ “Jewish tradition is clear in its opinion that these two works were originally one, yet they were to be regarded as separate from each other” (Williamson, 1985: XXI).

²⁸ See Juha Pakkala (2004:168-170) for the full outline of the different arguments.

completely the purpose of the author which, in this case, is to report about Ezra's fulfillment of his mission to Jerusalem. The third claim is from the chronological point of view. Myers argues that if Ezra arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month (Ezra 7:9b) and, together with the men of Judah and Benjamin, on the twentieth day of the ninth month he sat down to solve the issue of intermarriage (Ezra 10:9), it means the five months Ezra spent in Jerusalem (between the time he arrived and the resolution of the crisis), he was busy fulfilling his mission in Jerusalem²⁹ - to teach the law. Finally, Pakkala brings forth the contextual argument and defends that Nehemiah 8 is not about the building of walls, which is known to be the major contextual element of the NM. Instead, it is about the teaching of the law. This is what Williamson (1985:XXI) considers having Nehemiah 8 "out of place". In short, scholars are in common agreement that the direct background of Ezra 10 – the intermarriage crises, is Nehemiah 8. This assumption is based on different perspectives, thematic, contextual, chronological and authorial. In fact, it was the teaching of the Law of Moses, by Ezra, that the sinful behavior and actions among the returnees were revealed, repentance took place, and finally divorce became the only possible approved solution.

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to address the relationship between Ezra 10 and the rest of Ezra-Nehemiah's writings by dividing the current chapter into three major sections. The first major section included the first 6 chapters of the book of Ezra, known as the first unit. In the course of this writing we have tried to identify the central theme of this unit and its relationship with the issue of intermarriage, and we realized that in both Cyrus' and Darius' edicts the primary reason for the exiles to be given freedom to return to Jerusalem, their homeland, was to reconstruct the Temple of the Lord God of Israel. Now, for both pre- and postexilic ancient Israel, the temple was more than a place of worship; it symbolized God's presence in the midst of his elected ones and, therefore, any danger of bringing idolatry into God's presence had to be immediately eliminated. Divorce, in this case, is justifiable in the sense that those known as foreign wives were of detestable life style and should not be allowed to remain in the presence of the Holy One. The second major section accommodates the rest of the book of Ezra. Here it is understood that the major theme of the unit is the teaching of the Law of

²⁹ Myers (1965:76) suggests that Ezra had spent about five months teaching the Law of Moses to the returnees in Jerusalem.

Moses. Although the implementation of this theme is not explicitly indicated in the canonical text of Ezra, probably because of editorial reasons, this study concluded that Ezra 10 is in the context of the unit. For more than fifty years the returnees in the Promised Land never realized the danger of living with and getting influenced by those who lived a life of abomination until the time the Law was taught to them. The third and last major subdivision of this chapter is the book of Nehemiah, chapter 8 in particular. After a brief analysis of the relationship between the writing of Ezra and those of Nehemiah, we concluded that the differences between them strengthened their unity. The two sets of writings have the same principles, values and the same end. Moreover, the author of Nehemiah has indicated being against intermarriage though not as vigorously as Ezra. Lastly, with regard to the direct background of Ezra 10, this study has indicated that biblical scholars point to Nehemiah 8; it fits well with the central theme, the context, chronology as well as authorship of Ezra. In short, Ezra 10 – intermarriages and their abolition, seems to fit well in the context of Ezra-Nehemiah writings. What about the context of the Pentateuch? This will be the topic of the next search.

Chapter 4

Ezra 10 in Broader Literary Contexts

4.1. Introduction

In chapter three, we addressed the question as to how the abolition of intermarriage in Ezra 10 fits in the context of Ezra-Nehemiah's writing. In that search we came to the conclusion that first, with regard to Ezra 1-6 and the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem being its central theme, intermarriage became one of the dominant subjects in the sense that idolatry – the major outcome of this phenomenon, could not be reconciled with the holiness of God in His holy temple. Second, the teaching of the Law of Moses by Ezra, which is identified as the central idea of Ezra 7-9, was another major catalyst of this social crisis. It was the teaching of the Law that reminded the returnees what the Lord had said through Moses. Apparently, the crux of the covenant between the Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the people of Israel, right at Mount Sinai, in Exodus 34:1-29, was that they should not intermarry with the daughters of the peoples of the land, and the reason for this prohibition is stated in v.16 as follows, “וּלְקַחַת מִבְּנֹתֵי לְבָנֶיךָ וְזָנּוּ בְנֹתֵי אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶן וְהִזְנוּ אֶת־בְּנֶיךָ אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶן” (And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same). This is precisely what happened in Numbers 25, “While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with the Moabite women who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods” (vv.1-2). This is what the Lord wanted to avoid when He prohibited His people from making any treaty with the peoples of the land. Third, it was shown that Ezra 10 was related to the context of Nehemiah's writings from the point that even the author/editor of Nehemiah disapproved of this kind of marriage and took similar measures as those found in Ezra 10. Lastly, still with reference to Ezra 10 in relation to Nehemiah, biblical scholars have commonly agreed that Nehemiah 8 is thematically, contextually and chronologically part of Ezra's memoirs (EM). In short, there seems to be no doubt that Ezra 10 stands within the context of Ezra-Nehemiah's writings.

Having drawn the conclusions above, the question which will be addressed in the present chapter is how the issue of intermarriage in Ezra 10 is related to the entire corpus of the Hebrew Bible. The inter-textual approach which follows appears to relate Ezra 10 to further

literary contexts, but will focus only on three literary perspectives in order to be manageable. One is the Pentateuch perspective which is commonly considered to be the basic source text of Ezra 9-10. As Olyan, in his article entitled ‘Purity Ideology in Ezra-Nehemiah as a Tool to Reconstruct the Community’ argued that “First, expansive and creative exegesis of earlier texts such as Lev. 18:24-30, Deut. 23:4-9, and Deut. 7:1-6 play a central role in the exclusionist program, as others have noted” (2004:2). In other words, although the writer/editor of Ezra-Nehemiah was in a completely different context from that of the pre-exilic period, he/she used some of the Pentateuch traditions to justify his/her postexilic ideology on the issue of exogamy. This leads us to another reason why we believe the Pentateuch perspective played a great role in this topic – the law of antiquity and conservation¹, which acknowledges the fact that the Law of Moses bears the ultimate authority in every aspect of life for both pre- and postexilic ancient Hebrew communities. In other words, whatever decision was to be made, whether on individual or community levels, it had to be in accord with the Law God had given to Moses. In this respect, we will point out at least two examples that illustrate the role which the Law of Moses played in the Jewish community. One is found in Ezra 10:3c. When the gathering of the elders of the intended audience of Ezra’s together with Ezra had come up with the final resolution about the issue of intermarriage, which had subjected the entire nation to a great risk of complete extermination, they stated: “וכתורה יעשה” (And according to the Law let it be done). The entire gathering was very much aware of the fact that no matter who decides about what, the point is that every decision had to be in conformity with the Law. In this case, the Law is above all, and every aspect of life has to be measured by it. The second example shows how the New Testament writers understood and interpreted the role of the Law of Moses, though this is about 4-5 centuries after Ezra’s writings. In Matthew 19:1-2, for instance, it is reported that some Pharisees came to Jesus and asked him if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason. Though scholars, such as Brian (2002:43), argue that the term “lawful” has nothing to do with the Law of Moses (whether the Law approves it or not), but simply has to do with knowing who was right between the two schools of Shammai and Hillel, it is possible that by posing this rhetorical question “Οὐκ ἀνέγνωτε...?” (Haven’t you read...?), Jesus

¹ For the Jewish people, the Law of Moses functioned as the standard for any type of life, behavior or decision to be made. This is what Jean Ska (2006:164 and 169) calls the laws of antiquity and conservation, which means the older traditions are the most important and observation has to be done by both the individual and the community.

expected that these teachers would have read the law² and have understood what it says about the issue of marriage and divorce. Since Jesus understood that the Pharisees were trying to trap him (as was known to be the case in every encounter with him), He went on to affirm that God, the Lawgiver, had designed marriage the way He wanted it to be and, therefore, nobody had any authority to say or to do otherwise. Jesus quoted directly from Genesis 1:27 where it reads, “ברא אתו זכר ונקבה” (he [God] created male and female), and Genesis 2:24, “על־כן יעזב־איש את־אביו ואת־אמו ודבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחה” (Thus, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will be one flesh), and he concluded in Matthew 19:6b “ὅτι ὁ θεὸς συνζευξεν ἄνθρωπος μὴ χωριζέτω” (Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate). In response, it seemed like the Pharisees had the understanding that Moses had the power to change what God conceived from the beginning when they asked, “Why then, did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?” Jesus corrects this misunderstanding by making it clear that Moses did not change the Law. He simply gave them conditional permission because of the “σκληροκαρδίαν ὑμῶν” (hardness of your heart). In fact, it is agreed among scholars that when Moses came up with this alternative solution, the phenomenon of divorce and remarriage was already being practiced in the community.³ These two examples show how the Pentateuch persisted well as interpretative framework into the New Testament period. They also take us back to Ezra 10 where we can argue that the author of Ezra-Nehemiah had the obligation of acknowledging and respecting the authority of the Mosaic traditions in his contemporary situation.

The second literary perspective which will be considered in this study is the prophetic one, which aims at discerning the prophetic voice about the issue of intermarriage. This is an approach which also recognizes the role and authority of the Hebrew prophets in the political, social and religious lives of the community. Peterson (2002:6) describes the Hebrew prophet/prophetess according to his/her role. One is that he/she was able to see visions and, therefore, was called “חֹזֶה” which literally means ‘to see/seer’. In this case, the prophet was able to see and understand divine visions, as it is indicated in Numbers 12:6b “When a

² This study uses the term “law” in reference to Genesis 1:27 not in the sense of that which Moses received from God and developed in the books of Exodus throughout Deuteronomy. It is rather understood in connection with the Pentateuch.

³ For full discussion, see Laney (1992:3-5).

prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions; I speak to him in dreams”. Another role of the prophet/prophetess is the capacity to communicate effectively the visions or dreams he/she receives from the Lord to his/her audience. The third description is “אִישׁ־הָאֱלֹהִים” (man of God). According to Peterson (2002:6), the man of God has special powers and is very respected in the community, just like Elisha in 2 Kings 6:1-7. Having recognized the special powers Elisha had, his compatriots were uneasy about going to the Jordan without him. In fact, while they were there cutting the poles in order to build a house for themselves, the prophet Elisha performed an act impossible for ordinary people; he located the iron ax-head that had fallen into the water. The last designation of the Hebrew prophet/prophetess is “נְבִיאָה/נְבִי”⁴. This term seems to accommodate the first three designations; it has the connotation of a person who is able to see visions, communicate with both the divine and human beings, and who has supernatural powers. McKenzie (2005:68) summarizes the four descriptions as follows, “The Hebrew word translated ‘prophet,’ ‘nāvî’, refers to one who is called to be a spokesperson for Yahweh”. It is on this basis that this study aims to analyze the prophetic understanding of the foreign women in comparison with that of Ezra 9-10. The last literary perspective is from other Old Testament textual corpora which will bring other biblical texts into dialog with Ezra 10. This is in recognition that Ezra-Nehemiah was not the only ideology in the Second Temple Judean community⁴; there were other traditions which portrayed the image of foreign women differently. One clear example is the writings of Ruth – a tradition about a typical Hebrew man Boaz who marries a typical Moabite woman by the name of Ruth. How could it happen that two or more traditions with different points of view about intermarriage would circulate in the same community without being in conflict with each other? This and other concerns will appear throughout the present chapter. Now we shall move to the first perspective.

4.2. Intermarriage from the Pentateuch Point of View

In the introduction of the book which Christian Frevel edited on the topic of mixed marriages in the Second Temple literature, Frevel proposed that the subject of intermarriage in the context of Hebrew Bible should be approached from both diachronic and synchronic

⁴ Knoppers (2011:191).

perspectives⁵. In this appraisal, Jonker (2014:13) argued that when this issue is approached in a diachronic way, it does not necessarily result in a linear chronological description of how the texts developed, “but rather a multivocality which contributed to the process of identity formation in postexilic Judaism”. This admits the possibility that different traditions about intermarriage had progressively and simultaneously emerged in different contexts. A clear example of this phenomenon can be found in the 1st century A.D. Jewish community where there were at least two different perspectives about divorce and remarriage, as it has been already referred above. According to biblical scholars such as Frevel and Conczorowski, there are at least three distinct traditions about intermarriage in the Pentateuch – Patriarchal, Deuteronomistic, and Priestly, which influenced the spirit of anti-exogamy to Ezra’s recipients in the Second Temple Community. Though the three approaches have been addressed in chapter 2 of this study, it would be helpful for the discussion of the content of the present chapter to take a brief look.

4.2.1. Patriarchal Narratives

Traditionally speaking, the biblical term ‘Patriarch’ is always connected to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and our approach to this topic will therefore be limited to these three figures. Starting with Abraham’s marriage, the canonical text reports that he married Sarai (Gen. 11:29b), who was later called Sarah (Gen. 17:15). One aspect of great interest to our study is that in two instances Abraham introduced Sarah as his sister. The first instance is in Genesis 12:10-20 when Abraham and Sarah took refuge in Egypt because of famine that had devastated the region of Negev. While entering in the land of Egypt, Abraham instructed Sarah to introduce him as her brother, otherwise he would be killed and Sarah be taken to Pharaoh to be his wife. The other instance is in Genesis 20:1-17 where, like in Egypt, Abraham introduced himself to Abimelech king of Gerar as Sarah’s brother. When questioned by Abimelech why he introduced himself as Sarah’s brother, “Abraham replied, ‘I said to myself, there is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. Besides, she is really my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife’” (Gen. 20:12). In this case, Abraham married his half-sister. Did

⁵ Frevel (2011:14) argues that while it is important to consider the issue of intermarriage diachronically - its historical development throughout the Hebrew Bible, it is equally advisable to look at each incident in its unique and appropriate context.

Abraham consciously decide to marry his sister or was his marriage planned and made to happen by the third parties, such as parents or uncles? Unfortunately, at this point the text does not answer this kind of question. However, it is highly possible that an arranged marriage was part of Abraham's contemporary world view, as history will repeat itself in the next two generations after him.

When Isaac, Abraham's son, reached the age of taking a wife, the biblical text reports that Abraham sent his chief servant to go to his home country, supposedly to the land of Ur,⁶ and find a wife from among his relatives. Abraham did not want his son to marry one of the daughters of the Canaanites and, surprisingly, when the servant asked him what if the woman refuses to come with him to Canaan, should the servant take Isaac back to Ur, Abraham tested his faith in God, as he replied, "Make sure that you do not take my son back there. The Lord, the God of heaven who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who promised me on oath, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land' – he will send his angel before you so that you bring a wife for my son from there" (Gen. 24:6-7). Another interesting aspect here with Abraham is that he did not take God's promise for granted. He was fully aware of the fact that God is free to do what pleases Him. It is from this point that Dell (2010:185) stated, "Who are we, as human beings, to judge the acceptance of God's behavior?" Abraham knew that God had the right to do things differently from what He had promised him. In this case, Abraham's servant would be free from the oath, but there was one thing he should be sure of – "Only do not take my son back there" (Gen. 24:8c). Finally, the biblical narrative reports that Abraham's servant went back to Ur and brought Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel and granddaughter of Nahor, Abraham's brother, to Isaac (Gen. 24:15b). In this case, Isaac married his niece, the daughter of his cousin, the granddaughter of his father's brother. The same experience is repeated in Genesis 29:15-30 with the Patriarch Jacob, the son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham. Like his father and grandfather, Jacob got his wives among his relatives; he married his cousins, Leah and Rachel. The two wives were the daughters of Laban, his mother's brother. Up to this point, the canonical text indicates that the way marriage was practiced had pleased the entire family of the Patriarchs. One had

⁶ In Genesis 11:27-31 it is reported that Terah was the father of Abraham, Nahor and Hanan, and the whole family lived in Ur until the death of Hanan. After Hanan's death, Terah, Abraham, Sarai and Lot moved to the lands of Canaan, while Nahor and his wife Milcah remained in Ur of the Chaldeans.

to choose a wife among his relatives, either from the paternal or maternal lineage. In this case, the wife could be a half-sister, a niece or a cousin.

However, the first incident where a member of the patriarchal family does the opposite is in Genesis 26:34-35 where Esau, Isaac and Rebekah's older son, took wives from the Hittites. "When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite". These marriages brought grief and sadness to the patriarchal family, as it says, "Then Rebekah said to Isaac, 'I am disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living'" (Gen. 27:46). Unfortunately, the text does not go further to elaborate why Rebekah felt disgusted with Esau's marriages to the Hittite women, and why she would find life not worth of living if Jacob did the same. As far as the text reports, it does not sound to be a religious matter, because up to this point the God of Abraham hasn't pronounced anything for or against marriage with the peoples of Canaan. Even with Abraham, there is no straight forward reason why he did not want his son to take a Canaanite wife when he said, "I want you to swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living..." (Gen. 24:3). Again, when Isaac came to know that his older son Esau took wives from the Canaanite women, he said to his younger son Jacob, "Do not marry a Canaanite woman. Go at once to Paddah Aram, to the house of your mother's father Bethuel, take a wife for yourself there... May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful..." (Gen. 28:23). Aside from the fact that Abraham considers the oath as being taken under the name of God, and that Isaac claims God's blessings upon Jacob's marriage, there is no indication that God had pronounced anything on this matter. The text does not give us the reason why intermarriage was prohibited, as Frevel commented, "The rejected wives are denoted as 'Hittite' or 'Canaanite.' But what makes them a problem for the community is not explained further. They simply are the surrounding peoples who are not of Abrahamic descent..." (2011:8). For that reason, the question prevails as to why the patriarchal family of Isaac found marriage with the Canaanite women to be scandalous.

Malina and Neyrey are among biblical and archaeological scholars who can contribute significantly to our understanding of this social phenomenon. The major aim in their work 'An Archaeology of Ancient Personality' (1996) is to provide awareness to modern societies of how ancient Mediterranean people understood themselves. In their research, they pointed

out one element of great relevance to this present study. An important aspect modern people should know about Middle Eastern society, whether ancient or not, is that they are group-oriented people, and kinship is the heart of personal identity.⁷ They stated, “The characteristic feature of this model of the primitive (*sic!*) lies in the observation that primitives (*sic!*) never perceived themselves as single beings but believed to be irreducibly a part of a larger group” (1996:12). By larger group, one could also mean extended family or kinship group. This is probably the most important social level in a group-oriented society. The entire life of an individual, from birth to death, is rooted in the family.⁸ From this understanding, Malina and Neyrey moved on to argue that contrary to mostly individualistic societies where abnormality of a person is perceived from the psychological scientific methods, in an in-group society an abnormal person is one who fails to follow and achieve the level of his/her social relationships as expected by the entire group.⁹ Having understood quite a bit of the ancient personality, we come back to the question as to why Rebekah felt scandalized when her son Esau decided to personalize his marital choice rather than fulfilling his social obligations and the expectations of the group. While still considering the relevance of this question, one needs to consider the words of Frevel and Conczorowski in their article, ‘Deepening the Water: First Steps to a Diachronic Approach on Intermarriage in the Hebrew Bible’. They pointed out, “Some of the patriarchal narratives can be mentioned as examples for the morally based rejection of foreign brides” (2011:15). In other words, from the patriarchal point of view, it was immoral for one member of the family to get involved in an intercultural or interethnic marriage. When the term immoral is taken from its generic sense in a group-oriented society, it can mean the state of bringing dishonor to the entire family, especially to the older ones, as Malina and Neyrey (1996:166) have stated, “Honor is manifested by obedience to one’s father.” Now if Frevel and Conczorowski’s proposal that intermarriage in the patriarchal society meant nothing less than immorality, and Malina and Neyrey’s definition of immorality in an in-group society being a matter of disobedience to one’s parents, then this study will argue that first, Rebekah was disgusted because she had a

⁷ This is hypothesis number one in Malina and Neyrey (1996:16). Although their study was based on the first-century E. C. Mediterranean society, many would agree with this present writing that if there is any difference with the patriarchal society, it is not that much, and it is in the sense that society is an organic institution.

⁸ According to Malina and Neyrey (1996:158), it is in the family where individual persons are raised, nurtured, and led to maturity and, therefore, they argued that “The dominant and focal social institution for most people in the first century was the family”.

⁹ Malina and Neyrey (1996:156).

disobedient son – a situation within which no parent would feel comfortable. Second, Esau's intermarriage brought shame or dishonor to the entire family, again a state in which no family would be happy to be. In short, intermarriage in the patriarchal narratives was not a matter of sin – “aversion to God, the living of life without regard to God” (Leith, 1993:108); it was rather a sense of dishonor to one's entire family.

However, there are other circumstances in the patriarchal narratives where intermarriage occurred without any sense of dishonor. This study will mention only three. The first one is connected directly with Abraham, the founder of the patriarchal lineage. In Genesis 16 it is reported that Abraham took Hagar, an Egyptian woman as a wife. Although it is not explicitly stated that he took her as a wife, Abraham did involve himself in Hagar's life as much as a husband does to his wife. As result, Abraham had a son with Hagar. Moreover, after Sarah's death, the text in Genesis 25 indicates that Abraham took another wife named Keturah, who bore him children. Keturah's origin is uncertain, but scholars such as Winslow (2011:138) suggest that she was a Canaanite since Abraham was a full inhabitant¹⁰ in Canaan and there is no a hint that he had gone back to Ur in search of a wife. The second occasion where intermarriage happened without disturbance is when Judah, the son of Jacob, took Tamara as a “wife”¹¹ in Genesis 38. Judah's first marriage in this text was with an unnamed woman, the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. His older son Er also married a Canaanite woman named Tamara. The narrator does not say anything about Judah's wife, but after the death of his son Er, he prostituted himself with his widowed daughter-in-law Tamara, and she bore him two sons Perez and Zerah. In relation to these two children, Winslow (2011:135) commented, “Tamara's son Perez increased Judah's lineage” due to the fact that he appears in the list of Jacob's offspring that went with him up to Egypt in Genesis 46. Winslow also gave a reference of the good name Perez had among the elders in the time of Boaz in the writings of Ruth 4:12. The third and last incident is that of Joseph, the son of Jacob who married an Egyptian woman, Asenath daughter of Potiphera, the priest of On, who bore him two sons Manasseh and Ephraim who were incorporated into Jacob's descendants.

¹⁰ Abraham was no longer a nomad in the land of Canaan. Genesis 23 reports that when Sarah died, Abraham negotiated to buy a land which belonged to Ephron the Hittite and bought it for four hundred shekels of silver. From then on, Abraham had his own property.

¹¹ The canonical text does not explicitly indicate that Judah married Tamara in the real meaning of the word. The understanding of Judah and Tamara's marriage at this point is that they had children together.

Why were these marriages not as problematic as the one Rebekah felt marginalized by, in Genesis 27? In answering such questions, Winslow (2011:149) concluded, “A socio-historical approach considers the tension in these texts as a reflective of the conflicts among groups of Jews over exogamy.” In other words, this is a similar situation with that of the first century A.D. Jewish community, as mentioned above – the conflict between the schools of Shammai and Hillel over the issue of divorce. As to why there are such contradicting perspectives, scholars have proposed that this phenomenon is due to the existence of simultaneous, but conflicting voices among the Jewish community on the subject. According to Winslow’s conclusion above, these conflicting voices are not limited only to the patriarchal narratives, but also throughout the Pentateuch. This moves us on to the next perspective.

4.2.2. Deuteronomistic Rationale

Having analyzed the perspective from the patriarchal narratives over the issue of intermarriage and concluded that it was a matter of morality from the point of view of a group oriented society, now we turn to other narratives in the Deuteronomistic writings, with special focus on Exodus 34, and 1 Kings 11. Before we move on to the analysis from this perspective, however, two notes should be taken into consideration. First, the term Deuteronomistic refers to those laws and regulation which state explicitly how the relationship between Yahweh and the people of Israel should be. The people of Israel were to be Yahweh’s possession, and Yahweh was to be their only God. In this sense, the people of Israel were commanded to observe these laws and maintain a good relationship with Yahweh then they would have a peaceful life in the Promised Land. Otherwise, Israel would be taken away from the land and even banished permanently from the face of the earth.¹² In other words, Deuteronomistic laws and accounts are basically against apostasy and the worship of other gods. Frevel (2011:15) calls it “religious pattern”. This is where the concept of the Deuteronomistic history is based, as Levin (2005:70) said it right, “On the other hand, the Deuteronomistic history originated in the land of Judah, and openly supports the traditional Yahweh religion on the Davidic kings.” Second, the two texts listed above are not the only

¹² Scholars such as Levin (200:70-75) have argued that the Deuteronomistic tradition is based on the consequences of having human kings who have been portrayed to be the main culprit who let the people of Israel forsake their Yahweh.

ones which address the issue of intermarriage in the Deuteronomistic literature. They are representative of many other relevant texts which were interpreted and contextualized by the golah community to justify the rejection of intermarriage in the Second Temple period. Different from the patriarchal narratives which have been previously addressed, the unique characteristic of most of the Deuteronomistic accounts about intermarriage is that its prohibition is explicitly from the mouth of God, not from the patriarchs. This is the case in Exodus 34. Here God forbids this kind of marriage and gives the reason why the people of Israel should not intermarry with the peoples of other nations. 1 Kings 11 portrays one of the incidents where the laws of God have been violated; they have not been observed. King Solomon had violated the commandment pronounced by Yahweh in Exodus 34. This constitutes the scenario from which, according to canonical text and modern scholars, the intended audience of Ezra's writings built their ideology of intermarriage. In short, God had made a covenant with the people of Israel where they would be his personal possession in Exodus 34; and 1 Kings 11 is a typical episode in which King Solomon violates that covenant by marrying foreign women. As a result, the people of Israel were taken captive in Babylon – an experience which had, by any means, to be avoided by the golah community, in Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13.

With regard to Exodus 34, the best place to start the discussion is from chapter 32 where Israel had violated the most important aspect in their relationship with YHWH – “Do not make any gods to be alongside me, do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold” (Exodus 20:23). The people of Israel did precisely what the Lord had prohibited them; they had abandoned Yahweh who brought them out of the slavery in Egypt and turned to the god of gold they had made with their own hands. By turning to other gods, they were no longer Yahweh's possession and, therefore, God decided not to continue with them the rest of their journey to the Promised Land. It was after Moses had convincingly negotiated with YHWH and had interceded for the people of Israel that a covenant was made then comes Exodus 34. It is in this covenant that Yahweh says something about intermarriage, as it reads in verse 16: *ולקחת מבנותיו לבניך וזנו בנותיו אחרי אלהיהן והזנו את־בני אחרי אלהיהן* (And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same). From here the consensus reached by modern biblical scholars is that, differently from the patriarchal narratives, Deuteronomistic accounts view intermarriage as a potential threat to cause idolatry among the

people of Israel. As Frevel and Conczorowski (2011:15) noted, “Some of the patriarchal narratives can be mentioned as examples for the morally based rejection of foreign brides... In contrast, several texts labeled as ‘Deuteronomistic’ refer to the danger of apostasy provoked by the exchange of daughters or by the religious influence of foreign women.” This note raises a question as to why only women, and not men, were portrayed to be the potential cause of apostasy, as it is also the case in Ezra 9-10. This takes us to the second text of the present discussion – 1 Kings 11.

This text is about the influence of foreign women to King Solomon’s apostasy. The text states explicitly that “As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been” (v.4). Solomon had violated the law pronounced by Yahweh in Exodus 34 and later repeated. Consequently, the Lord became angry with Solomon and decided to divide the kingdom, as it reads, “Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the Lord’s command. So the Lord said to Solomon, ‘Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates’” (1 Kings 11:10-11). Far more than just dividing the kingdom, Yahweh had also decided to hand over both kingdoms Israel and Judah to foreign nations, according to Jeremiah 25:8-11. The first decision – the division of the kingdom was fulfilled in 1 Kings 12. There were now two kings, Rehoboam, Solomon’s son ruled over Judah, and Jeroboam became the king of Israel. Later on, the word of the Lord which came through Jeremiah was also fulfilled. The Lord handed over the Northern Kingdom (Israel) to the Assyrians, around 740 – 732 B.C. and the Southern Kingdom (Judah) to the Babylonians in the years 597 – 587 B.C. One could ask another question, as to how women would have such strong religious influence over their men (husbands) in a highly regarded patriarchal society as that of the Bible. A partial answer to this concern has been given in the previous sessions. It was already mentioned that in the ancient Middle East, gender issues were clearly defined and highly respected and adhered to. While men were identified with the world outside, women were responsible for indoor activities which included taking care of and providing for the immediate needs to their family

members.¹³ This also reflected the role of women in the religious life of the household. Gerstenberger (2002), for example, indicated that the introduction of the national worship which was centralized in the temple and the fact that Yahweh became the national deity did not completely rule out other cultic levels of worship, such as family, clan and tribal shrines. It seems like the men (being responsible for public and outdoor activities) were in charge of the temple cults, whereas the women took care of the family shrines. He complemented this hypothesis when he wrote, “Women, too, were active in the cult, but because of the male dominance which had come about in the cult of Israel they could only be active underground and contrary to the theology of the scribes” (Gerstenberger, 2002:260).

From a canonical point of view, the above argument makes sense. Two examples will be sufficient to attest this point. One is when Rachel stole her father’s gods in Genesis 31. For Rachel to know the use of the gods, where they were kept, and how they were taken care of, she might have learned all these from her mother. This assumption is based on the fact that, as mentioned above, in Rachel’s society gender defined everyone’s area of influence. Fathers spent time outside in public places together with their sons, passing to them the necessary skills in preparing them for their future responsibilities, whereas mothers kept themselves indoors together with their daughters and prepared them to assume their future duties properly and faithfully. Foerster (1964:129) pointed out, “The woman’s place was in the home; girls were confined to the women’s boudoirs.” Moreover, the text does not say anything about what happened to the gods Rachel stole from her father’s household. Did Jacob discover that Rachel had those gods with her? If he did, what was his reaction? Perhaps, Jacob let Rachel take full responsibility of the gods she brought from her parental home. In this case, it is possible that Laban’s wife was in charge of the family shrine, and Rachel learned from her. If this was the case, then it is highly possible that Rachel, now as a wife, was in charge of her own family’s religious life. Another example is found in 1 Kings 11, which we do not need to repeat, except to stress the fact that King Solomon’s wives framed and redefined his religious life. Through their influence, Solomon forsook the God of his ancestors, who was also the God of his father David. Then in 1 Kings 16:29-33 King Ahab is labeled as the most evil king of all the kings who ruled Israel. Through the influence

¹³ See Malina and Neyrey (1996:173). Moreover, Gerstenberger (2002:20) stated, “Presumably the head of the family did not exercise an absolute rule, but rather the representative of the family in the outside world, whereas his wife looked after domestic matters.”

of his wife Jezebel, Ahab promoted the worship of Baal, the chief deity in the kingdom of Sidonian, Jezebel's place of origin. From these examples, one could apply the popular proverb which says, "If man is the head of the family, then the woman is the neck, and she can move the head to any direction she wants". This is the case with intermarriage in the Deuteronomistic narratives. In short, Deuteronomistic narratives portray foreign women as a potential threat for apostasy of their Jewish husbands. They moved their husbands away from Yahweh, and led them to the worship of other gods – the gods of their nations. To avoid such situation, endogamy was highly recommended in both pre- and postexilic communities, as Winslow (2001:132) commented, "Some Torah narratives imply that taking a wife among one's kin is required to preserve Israel's identity. In a similar vein, Torah directives to Israel for entering the land prohibit intermarriage with the inhabitants. They indicate that intermarriage with Canaanites would lead to Israel's apostasy and ultimate exile from the land." One can understand why 1 King 11 has served as one of the main texts of exegetical reference in Ezra-Nehemiah's writings, to justify their anti-exogamy actions. Nehemiah 13:26-27, for instance, reads, "Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women. Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?" Foreign women were seen as the cause of apostasy and, therefore, the *golah* had to stay away from them. This leads us to the third Pentateuch point of view on the issue of intermarriage – the Priestly approach.

4.2.3. The Priestly Motivation

While the patriarchal and Deuteronomistic rationales have to do with morality and apostasy respectively, the priestly narratives approach this subject from the cultic point of view, motivated by two major elements– priesthood and temple. At this point, intermarriage is not only about bringing shame to the family or leading the *golah* to apostasy, but it has to do with contamination which results in a state of impurity. In the first place, Israel as a nation was called to be a "ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש" (kingdom of priests and a holy nation), as it reads in Exodus 19:6. This divine call implied that the existence of the people of Israel was exclusively for Yahweh alone. Israel as a nation was called to be a kingdom of priests. In other words, NET Bible First Edition (2006) would say all the Israelites were called to be "kings and priests". Moreover, Israel as a nation was to be holy; Israel was to be set apart for

Yahweh, as it reads in Leviticus 11:44, “והייתם קדשם כי קדוש אני” (and be holy because I am holy). Again when Isaiah in 6:13 describes how the Promised Land would be destroyed, as proclaimed in Jeremiah 25, he portrays Israel as “זרע קדש” (a holy seed). In this case, Israel is as a holy nation, while other nations are impious. These two cultic concepts – וגוי קדוש and זרע קדש (a holy nation and a holy seed), were reinterpreted and applied in the context of Ezra’s recipients in the Second Temple community. The golah had developed that which Olyan called “Purity Tradition”¹⁴ For the postexilic Jewish community, “Through intermarriage the holy seed of Israel becomes intermingled with unconsecrated or profane seed. Intermarriage thus profanes that which God has consecrated to himself, the holy seed of Abraham and Israel” (Hayes, 1999:10). Another tradition which was brought from the Pentateuch writings into the golah context was about genealogical purity. Frevel and Conczorowski have argued that this tradition might have been based on Numbers 25:12-13 which reads, “Therefore tell him (Eleazar, the son of Aaron) I am making my covenant of peace with him. He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites.” According to these scholars, it was because of this tradition that both Ezra and Nehemiah were very concerned with the priests who had been involved in this social crisis. At least one example can attest this point – the sending away of Eliashab the high priest, and son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite (Nehemiah 13:28). In this situation Olyan (2004:6) commented that “Such an action would result in the exclusion from the priesthood of all males in the priestly line with any alien ancestry”. This tradition takes us to the second major element in priestly literature – the temple.

Traditionally speaking, the Aaronites were in charge of the holy items, the tabernacle and everything in it. That was their inheritance – to serve the Lord and take care of the holy items, and their economic survival would be based on the holy offering which the people of Israel brought to the Lord in the Tent of Meeting¹⁵ (Numbers 17-18). Biblical scholars have argued

¹⁴ Olyan (2004:1-16) has addressed at least three important aspects about purity tradition. First, different from the patriarchal and Deuteronomistic perspectives, the priestly approach was much more inclusive, which means every non-Israelite (men, women and children) is sacrilegious and therefore dangerous to the Israelites. Second, intermarriage did not defile only those who were physically in contact with the unholy women, but it also polluted their offspring perpetually. Third, impurity became, in some circumstances, something contagious and therefore needed some ritual performances in order to recover the state of purity.

¹⁵ This was the case with the priests in the Second Temple Community. From the fact that the Persian Empire,

that the reaction of the returnees against the offer by the “עַם הָאָרֶץ” (people of the land) to help in the reconstruction of the temple was mainly due to this tradition. Farisani (2003:40) have observed that though the reaction of the golah might also be explained from both a political perspective “you have no authority over us” and from an economical point of view “you have no legal share with us”, the term which Nehemiah employed – הֶלֶק (share), is “used more often to indicate ‘righteousness.’” In this sense, the temple is the dwelling place of the Holy One and, therefore, it should be built by only those who had been elected and called to be holy. Olyan (2004) has also suggested that the removal of Tobiah and all his belongings from the temple chamber should be viewed as an action motivated solely by cultic principles. The temple was in a state of impurity, and according to Olyan (2004:10), “the source of the pollutions, the text implies, is the presence of Tobiah the Ammonite, his belongings, and those of his house”. The three concepts – the kingdom of priests, the holy nation/seed and the place of the tabernacle in the Pentateuch tradition – might have contributed greatly for the anti-exogamy spirit and action among the golah community in Ezra 10.

In short, the ideology of intermarriage in Ezra 10 did not originate with the postexilic community; it had been an integral part of the whole Pentateuch corpora to demarcate the boundaries between “the in-group” and “the outsiders”. In previous paragraphs, this study has addressed three rationales found in the Pentateuch narratives. One is identified with the patriarchal narratives, which served to protect family identity and cohesion. The second is the Deuteronomistic rationale. This one has used anti-exogamy as a tool to draw a line between Yahweh’s people and those of other religions. In this case, intermarriage was seen as a highway which would lead the citizens of the kingdom of priests to forsake Yahweh in favor of the Canaanite gods. The third rationale is the priestly one, which scholars consider “to represent the most extensive and sophisticated anti-exogamy texts in biblical writings” (Frevel, 2011:16). At this point, it was the aim of the Israelites, the holy seed of Abraham and the exclusive possession of Yahweh, who were elected and called to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, to preserve their status of genealogical and cultic purity in the midst of

as mentioned several times in the previous chapters, had used the temples as channels through which taxes and other economic incomes would be collected, the priests became the key figure in this area, as Douglas (2002:2) has asserted, “They (the priests) had been in control of the material and fiscal resources of the Temple, and had wide-flung alliances with the rich and the noble in Judah and around.”

their multi-cultural, ethnic and religious Persian and later Hellenistic contexts. Having come to these conclusions, we now move on to investigate briefly the prophetic voice on this topic.

4.3. Intermarriage from the Prophetic Rationale

Another important voice in the Hebrew Bible is that of the prophet. Our purpose in the following paragraphs is to briefly analyze the prophetic point of view and, probably, influence in the issue of intermarriage in the Second Temple period. Weems is one of the biblical scholars who has made a significant contribution to this area of study. In her publication ‘Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets (1995), Weems indicated that most of the prophets used marriage and female’s sexuality to convey “God’s demands on Israel.”¹⁶ If we take a close look at the prophetic messages, we will notice that they targeted basically three areas: religious, social and political. From the fact that the last two areas had a great influence on the first one, Weems observed that the prophets used marriage and female sexuality to demonstrate Israel’s unfaithfulness to God, as she wrote, “Despite the tendency of modern audiences to see marriage as a poetic device to fantasize about romance, courtship, and intimacy, for the prophets marriage was a trope for contemplating God’s power and Israel’s punishment” (1995:5). In this case, Israel stands for the wife and God for the husband. Unlike other parts of the Hebrew Bible, such as the patriarchal narratives, the Deuteronomistic accounts and the postexilic ideology, where the issue of intermarriage is all about Israelites (men) and the Canaanite women, for the prophets the concern was about Israelites (men and women) and foreign gods, especially Baal. In her analysis about the theology of Hosea, Newsome (1984:38) argued that “A third manner in which Israel had broken Yahweh’s covenant is by means of its false worship, and it is to this sin that Hosea devotes a great deal to his prophetic energies... But Israel’s most serious apostasy had to do with its worship to the Canaanite deity Baal.” In fact, one of the meanings of the name “בעל” (Baal) is husband.¹⁷ Israel as a nation had married Yahweh through the covenant at Sinai. When she arrived in the Promised Land, she abandoned her husband and

¹⁶ Weems (1995:3).

¹⁷ Van der Merwe (2013:221). In agreement with other scholars, Newsome (1984:38) argues that “Because of Baal’s role as the sustainer and the producer of life, his worship often involved the sexual union of men and women (sacred prostitution) which was performed for the purpose of reminding Baal (a word which means ‘husband’) of his role in making the earth fertile.” It is in this context that Elijah confronted King Ahab in 1 Kings 17 to prove that it is not Baal but the Lord God of Israel who is Israel’s husband; it is Yahweh who gives rain, life and all kinds of life’s provisions.

prostituted/married herself to Baal, a foreign god. Weems (1995:26) summarizes it this way, “The covenant in the wilderness became a marriage; Israel’s idolatry was interpreted as betrayal and adultery; Israel’s estrangement was divorce; and the reunion of God and Israel was reconciliation.” In this sense, we can observe that it is likely that the Hebrew prophets did not spend much time pointing to individuals who married the Canaanite women. The two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, who are explicitly indicated to have intervened directly in the situation of the postexilic community seem not to have seen anything wrong with the marriages in that context. One could argue that this social crisis was not reported to them, as it was to Ezra. One can also defend that the prophets did say something about intermarriage, and it was the responsibility of the editor who had the privilege of selecting the material which would definitely accomplish his/her goals. As mentioned in the previous chapters, these two prophets were very concerned about the reconstruction of the temple, according to Ezra 6:14, which reads, “So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo.” VanderKam (2001:3) agrees with the canonical text with the fact that the major mission of these two prophets was focused on the construction of the temple, when he said, “and the two prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the people to get on with their task”. In short, it is likely that the ideology of intermarriage in the Second Temple Community did not have any prophetic influence.

4.4. Intermarriage in Other Biblical Writings

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, any study on the issue of intermarriage in the Hebrew Bible has to be addressed from a diachronic point of view, and at the same time, with the consideration that each case represents its own context. In the next few sections, this study will attempt to analyze intermarriage from the perspective of other writings in the Hebrew Bible, with a particular focus on the book of Ruth. We will also bring very brief considerations from the writings of Proverbs and Esther.

4.4.1. The writings of Ruth

The best place for our departure in this discussion on Ruth will be to answer the question of date and purpose of the book. Scholars differ in their opinions, as far as date is concerned, and that is basically due to the text itself. Some have based their argument on Ruth 1:1 which reads, “In the days when the judges ruled, there was famine in the land, and a man from

Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons went to live for a while in the country of Moab". These scholars defend that the book was written during the time of Judges, far back before the monarchy system.¹⁸ This hypothesis has received a lot of criticism, and one of the strongest being that the context of Judges is significantly different from that of Ruth. While the latter accommodates a peaceful and well organized setting, the former is characterized by social disorder and political instability.¹⁹ Other scholars defend that the book of Ruth is a postexilic literary product. Based on the fact that the context of the book of Ruth is peaceful and agrarian, Larkin (1996:22) contended, "Consequently, it has been suggested that Ruth dates from a tranquil period between the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah on the one hand, and the conquest of Alexander on the other (i.e. late fifth to mid-fourth century B.C.)." A third group of scholars, such as Atkinson (1983:25) maintains the centrist approach and defend that the real telling of the story happened during the time of Judges, but was then composed in the postexilic period. This agrees with the fact that, like many other Old Testament narratives, the story of Ruth had experienced oral transmission from one generation to the next until the time it was put in written form. As mentioned in the course of this study, it is highly possible that every narrator had the privilege of adjusting the story to his/her particular context. In this case, even the editor(s) of the book of Ruth had the advantage of contextualizing the text in order to respond to his/her contemporary situation. Here we can understand that the collection of this particular tradition and its composition were guided by what the editor wanted to achieve.

According to Atkinson (1983:26), "There are many who think that the book [of Ruth] was written after the exile, as a reaction to the seemingly harsh views of Ezra and Nehemiah in recalling the people of God back to their exclusiveness; those who had intermarried with foreigners were called back to the faith of their fathers in which such intermarriage was banned."²⁰ Although Ezra and Nehemiah are regarded to be some of the key leaders of the

¹⁸ See McKinley (1999:151) for more details.

¹⁹ Curtis (1996:143) described the context of the book of Judges as chaotic and out of order, when he wrote, "The book of Judges describes a period of brutal, bloody warfare of various tribes of Israel against outside oppressors and of the tribes with each other. Murder, treachery, rape, brutality, violence, theft are norms of behavior." In contrast to the context of the book of Ruth, Curtis stated, "The book of Ruth presents no such picture of the period of Judges. In Judah it is a time of peace and prosperity. There is a settled agricultural life with a stratified but not oppressive society... Markers of social conflict were submitted to the established court of the city elders who were available at the city gate to resolve whatever issues were submitted to them."

²⁰ Atkinson's proposal is supported by other biblical scholars, such as Curtins (1996:141) and Phiri (2006:320)

Second Temple community, it is possible that their ideology was not supported by the majority of the society. In fact, it has been repeatedly mentioned in this writing that the approach taken by Ezra's intended readers in the Second Temple community with regard to intermarriage was from a cultic point of view. In other words, there was a sense that Israel in general and the priestly lineage in particular were set apart for God and therefore should not be in contact with anything unholy. Foreign women, particularly those who once had sexual intercourse, were also regarded as unholy. For that reason, the priests were recommended to marry a virgin, even if the woman was an Israelite. Moreover, in his publication on 'Theologies in the Old Testament' Gerstenberger has highlighted that Yahwism seemed not to be the only religion in Israel as a nation.²¹ In fact, both the Torah and the prophets made it clear that Yahweh was not the only deity in Israel, when they emphasized consistently that the people of Israel should not have other gods besides Yahweh. Two examples will be sufficient to clarify this point. First, Amos 4:4 brings to our attention that besides the temple, the people of Israel had at least two more places of worship, Bethel and Gilgal. The prophet is explicitly saying that the people would go those places to sin more. The second example is Ezekiel 8 where God takes Ezekiel in a vision to the Temple of Jerusalem and shows him the idol that was planted right at the entrance of the north gate to the inner court. Stiebing, (2003:286) stated, "The Judean reform party, probably strengthened by the addition of some of its counterparts from the north, blamed the destruction of Israel primarily on that kingdom's religious practices, especially its worship of other deities in addition to Yahweh". Now, if this was the situation among the temple and the elite people, one of the concerns one might encounter is how it was much more the case among those who lived a common and ordinary life, with so many spiritual challenges (i.e. fear of supernatural powers and natural

who pointed out, "In Ezra 10 and Nehemiah 13:23-27, God is presented as being opposed to Hebrew men marrying foreign women, but in the book of Ruth God is seen as blessing a foreign woman, Ruth, and enabling her to conceive a child who became the grandfather of David, the king of Israel"; and Larkin (1996:53), to mention only three.

²¹ Throughout his book, Gerstenberger made it clear that it is unrealistic to think of one theology in the Old Testament. As one moves from the family level to the monarchy system, it is important to also think also of different religious interpretations. The way a family viewed God was quite different from that of the clan, tribe, and kingdom. More importantly is the fact that at a certain point, Yahweh became the national deity and the temple the centralized place of worship. However, it is highly possible that the family, clan, and tribal systems, including the shrines, beliefs and ethical values, remained active in their respective levels. He commented, "Thus in affairs of state the king becomes the key religious figure in the truest sense of the word. However, that in no way means that the state religion became the exclusive and sole legitimate religious institution" (Gerstenberger, 2002:181).

phenomena) and who shared life with peoples from other faith experiences. From here we can probably agree with Atkinson (1983:24) who observed that “The book of Ruth is a story about very ordinary people facing very ordinary events.” Furthermore, this study has demonstrated that the Israelites, even the ordinary people, knew their story; the story of their ancestors (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses); and the exodus tradition. They knew that, though some of the patriarchal and Deuteronomistic narratives opposed intermarriage, Abraham was twice in his life time married to foreign women, an Egyptian and a Canaanite; Joseph was married to an Egyptian woman and his two children became Jacob’s; Moses was married to a Cushite woman, Judah had taken Tamara, a foreign woman and his daughter-in-law, as a wife and bore Perez who became one of the important figures in the tribe of Judah.²² When the Babylonian experience was over, the exiles returned to their homeland and got themselves settled socially, economically and politically. After almost a century it was then that a scribe called Ezra came and established a rule which seemed to turn life into chaos. People had to divorce their wives and send them away together with their children. Consequently, the divorced ones – both men and women – had to think of starting all over *de novo*. This might have brought some kind of social and economic instability at the grass roots level. It is in this context that scholars believe that the book of Ruth was there to speak on behalf of the silenced victims in Ezra and Nehemiah’s ideology. In fact, some biblical academics move to the extreme of questioning whether the Deuteronomistic laws were ever practiced by the common people. Curtis (1996:145) commented, “The differences between D’s law and the levirate marriage and the practices described in Ruth suggest that the author of Ruth is seeking to refute the Deuteronomic conception of the practice. The D law is so tightly restricted that one must wonder if there were ever occasion in historic time when the law could actually have been applied.”²³

More importantly, the book of Ruth does not only contest the ideology of intermarriage, but it also seems to indicate that first, marriage with foreign women took place after the bride has

²² See Winslow (2011:135-136).

²³ Grabbe (2004:173) is in the same line of thought and argues that it is highly possible that the written law was quite different from those laws practiced by the common people in their everyday lives. He commented, “Unfortunately, this distinction is not always understood, and the legal material of the text is read off as if it were an actual description of law and justice in the living society.”

converted to Yahwism²⁴. This means, in most cases, marriage between a Jewish man and a foreign woman in Judah did not take place only on basis of love and passion between the two. The foreign woman had to be a member of the assembly of Yahweh before the actual marriage happened. Hyman argues that Ruth's response to Naomi, "Do not urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried" (1:16), is not to be taken for granted. According to Hyman (1984:189), these words mean sincere confession and honest decision which led Ruth's change of her identity. Second, Brenner (1999:151) believes that the author of Ruth is to some extent disagreeing with the law which says the Moabites were prevented from being members of Yahweh's community, up to the tenth generation. In Deuteronomy 23:2-3 it reads, "No one born of a forbidden marriage or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation. No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation." The same law was quoted by Nehemiah during his reform in 13:1-2: "On that day the Book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people and there it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God, because they had not met the Israelites with food and water but had hired Balaam to call a curse down on them. (Our God, however, turned the curse into a blessing)." But now here was Ruth, a Moabite woman, who came and got the blessings of the elders of the community.²⁵ The first thing the elders did was to place Ruth in the category of the matriarchs of Israel, Rachel and Leah, who were in charge of building the nation by giving birth to the twelve tribes of Israel. Then she was also blessed with the role of Tamara who was a foreigner but became the mother of Perez, one of the most important figures in the tribe of Judah. To put it differently, Brenner (1999:152) would say, "Ruth is

²⁴ Curtis (1996:146) commented that Boaz pronounced his marriage to Ruth after her genuine conversion based on her answer when he asked her, "Who are you", and she replied, "I am your servant Ruth", then Boaz pronounced the blessings, "The Lord bless you, my daughter" (3:9-10). In agreement with Curtis, Hyman (1984:197) suggested that Boaz had changed the status of Ruth from being a foreigner to one among those who were brought into the land by the Lord "May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge" (2:12). In other words, Ruth did not come on her own; it was the Lord, God of Israel who brought her into the promised land, as He did to the people of Israel, "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (Exodus 19:4).

²⁵ In Ruth 4:11-12 it reads, "We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah who together built up the house of Israel ... Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, who Tamar bore of Judah."

joining the line of Rachel, Leah and Tamara to become, like them, a mother in Israel.” In short, the writings of Ruth not only contradict Ezra and Nehemiah’s ideology on the issue of intermarriage, but they also question the application of some of the laws found in the Pentateuch. Before we draw some conclusions from our discussion in the present chapter, it would be very beneficial to address briefly other literary sources which seem to pertain.

4.4.2. The writings of Esther

With regard to the book of Esther, scholars such as Semenyé (2006:559) have believed that it was written during or after the Persian period by someone who knew almost everything about social and political life in the empire, describing the historical moment of a Jewish woman who became the deliverer of her people in times of great risk of a xenophobic experience. All the plans had been set up for the extinction of the entire ethnic group of the Jews who had remained in exile in the Persian Empire. Now God (though the entire writing of Esther does not mention anything which is directly related to God) raises up a woman to save his people. Different from Ruth and other cases of intermarriage, here was a Jewish woman who was married to a non-Jewish man. This case is illustrated by Brenner in her article on ‘Ruth as a Foreign Worker and the Politics of Exogamy’ with the 20th century A.D. reality in Israel when she said, “In Israel of the 1990s such union will be less problematic if the local spouse is a woman, ostensibly because any offspring of the union will still be considered Jewish according to orthodox *halakhah*; however, both combinations are known to have happened” (1999:159). It is true that the situation with Esther is very different from that of the 20th century A.D. Israel. However, the point of interest in this study is to see a woman becoming a heroine in a society which seems to maintain a strong sense of patriarchalism. This makes us reconsider, what has been pointed out above, that the real life of the ordinary people seems to be different from that which is written in the Deuteronomistic laws. There is no point at which one could think that a tradition which considerably elevates the status of a woman would circulate in the same community as that of Ezra and Nehemiah. This is, therefore, one more example illustrating the diachronic yet synchronic and multivocality of this phenomenon.

4.4.3. Proverbs 1-9

Finally, we turn to the women described in Proverbs 1-9. Our brief note in this respect will be based on two literary publications, one by Estes²⁶ and the other by Lucas.²⁷ Unlike most of the Old Testament writings, Lucas approaches this topic in the book of Proverb from the positive side of it. He first extracts verses which speak of the two types of women. One is portrayed as a mother (1:8; 6:20); a young wife from whom a young husband gets joy (5:18-19); a queen who gives very good instruction to her son (31:1-9); and a noble wife who rarely is encountered (31:10-31); and the other as a loose woman found in 2:16-19; 5:3-6; 6:24-29; and 7:1-27. Between these two women, Lucas (2003:107) suggested that one is identified as the ‘wisdom woman’. He wrote, “However, the main female figure is Wisdom herself.” From here Lucas moves on to observe that the wisdom woman is closely related to God himself. The major point here is that this wisdom was present right from the beginning when God was creating the universe. There are, of course, some scholarly debates as to whether wisdom is part of God’s essence, or it is just like any other creature. Lucas’ argument in this respect is that in 8:22 it is quite clear that this wisdom is “a created entity”²⁸ Estes is another scholar who has significantly contributed to this topic and handled it from two approaches – positive and negative. Estes started by bringing different views about the woman in Proverbs 1-9 and outlined them as follows: Some scholars identify her with a loose woman, others associate her with a foreign woman, still others connect her with an adulteress, and finally Estes equates her with a strange woman.²⁹ Estes moved on to highlight how the text itself describes the strange woman as an evil woman and a woman of adultery.³⁰ After contrasting the strange woman with the wisdom woman, Estes (2010:162-163) suggested that both women are metaphorically represented, characterizing ethical systems that compete in humankind. The wisdom woman represents a life based on the fear of God, while the strange woman portrays an unethical life which moves towards a terrible doom. He articulated, “Thus, the specific behaviors of the Strange Woman, such as adultery and prostitution, are examples of the kinds of evil that folly produces in contrast to the righteous actions and attitudes that are the fruit of

²⁶For full discussion see Estes (2010:151-165).

²⁷ Lucas (2003:107-108).

²⁸ Lucas (2003:107-108).

²⁹ Estes (2010:152).

³⁰ Estes (2010:154).

wisdom.” This is in line with Proverbs 1:7, which is widely considered as the major theme of the entire book.³¹ In other words, Proverbs 1-9 has nothing to do with intermarriage. Instead, it is a metaphorical teaching which illustrates both a godly life, which is conducted with wisdom, and a life without God. At this point, we are therefore tempted to propose that, like the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the writings of Proverbs seem not to contribute in any way for the formation of intermarriage ideology in the Second Temple Jewish Community.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter has sought to address the issue of intermarriage as reflected in other parts of the Hebrew Bible – the Pentateuch, the Prophets and other writings such as Ruth, Esther and Proverbs, in relationship to Ezra 10. In the introduction, it was mentioned that biblical scholars have observed that one of the best ways to address this subject would be from a diachronic approach, but with an acknowledgment that each case stood in its own setting; each case had its own motivations. In this sense, it is suggested that this phenomenon should be viewed as multi-vocal in nature. With regard to the Pentateuch literature, it is also observed that when this topic is approached from the patriarchal narratives, it turns out to be a moral issue; when it is from a Deuteronomistic rationale, it sounds like it is a religious issue; and when addressed from the priestly perspective, intermarriage tends to be a matter of purity. Of all these three rationales, the latter seems to have contributed greatly to the formulation of intermarriage ideology among Ezra’s recipients in the Second Temple Community. Olyan (2004:1) has adequately articulated this point when he said, “The purity ideology of Ezra-Nehemiah functions as one of several significant tools used to reconfigure the Judean community through the definition of who is Judean and the expulsion of those classed as aliens.” The purity ideology was grounded on three basic elements: priesthood, genealogy and temple. In relation to the prophetic voice, this study has indicated that it seems like it has no influence, either positively or negatively in this subject. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah who are explicitly indicated in the canonical text to have ministered the postexilic community are silent. Could this silence be the choice of the editor/author of the text or that the prophets found intermarriage not as serious a threat to the life of the community as it looked like in the eyes of Ezra-Nehemiah’s editor. This point is not clear.

³¹ Barker (1995:936).

Lastly, it is the rationale from other writings of the Hebrew Bible where this phenomenon seems to be contested. These writings are to some extent in accord with some of the Pentateuch narratives which view foreigners in general and women in particular as “the main support of the Davidic dynasty” (Douglas, 2002:2). Ruth stands as typical example of this supposition. Grabbe (2004:171) stated it well when he wrote, “The picture of disbanding foreign women in Ezra-Nehemiah is just one perspective... One prime example is the book of Ruth in which a Moabite woman is not only accepted into the Jewish community to marry prominent citizen of Bethlehem but becomes an ancestor of King David.” The same is observed in Esther’s writings where a woman is portrayed as a deliverer as well as in wisdom literature where female gender is identified with both godly and ungodly living. More importantly, a woman in some of the wisdom writings is portrayed as an agent that was actively involved in the process of creation. Having stated these remarks, the conclusion proposed in this study, is that Ezra 10 seems to be a result of a hermeneutical work of earlier biblical texts, with, of course, the exegete’s own motivations, yet in tension with the realities of the ordinary people of their day. So far, we have covered the topics related to the canonical text – the literary analysis of Ezra 10; Ezra 10 in the context of Ezra-Nehemiah’s writings; and Ezra 10 in relationship to the entire Hebrew Bible. Now the next task is to move on to the world behind the text – a socio-historical investigation, to find out how this subject – the anti-exogamy ideology in Ezra 10, was viewed in the Persian Empire in general and Judah in particular.

Chapter 5

Socio-historical Context of Ezra

5.1. Introduction

In chapter one, this study has sought to indicate that the Bible is about God and humankind; it is the revelation of God and the response of humankind. It is also mentioned that in this process of God's interaction with humankind there are essential elements such as religion, history, anthropology and language which make the purpose of this encounter – God and humankind, meaningful. To illustrate this point, it is mentioned still in this study that the canonical text interpreted the Babylonian experience as one of the means through which God revealed His will to His people – the Israelites. Nebuchadnezzar was an instrument that God used to rebuke his people for their disobedience, while the Persian emperors became an instrument for the restoration of the nation after the exile. Both the empowering of foreign rulers to punish the people of Israel and the emerging of deliverers (whether strangers or locals) to rescue them, are portrayed as either projections of real or actual events that happened in historical time, place, and with real people. It is, therefore, in this light that modern biblical scholars have suggested that for a sound biblical interpretation which aims to understand the meaning of a message embedded in the ancient text, such as the Bible, one should engage in dialogue with all the core elements aforementioned. This is due to the fact that, as mentioned in the first chapter of this study, there is no method of biblical interpretation which is capable of providing all the answers to all the questions that a biblical text might need in order to disclose its meaning.¹ Gerstenberger (2002:15) emphasized this point when he wrote, “The faith of individuals and groups is lived out in specific historical and social situations. That is why these situations in life are so important and must be brought out with and behind the texts if we are to have better knowledge of people's beliefs”.

As we come to the present chapter, we start by agreeing with Kessler (2008:1) who said, “Without understanding the history of his people, it is impossible to understand the history of God's interaction with them.” It is in this sense that we will devote our attention to the socio – historical context of Ezra 10 by addressing, first, some socio-political issues of the

¹ See chapter 1.6.

Babylonian and the Persian Empires, which might have contributed to the immigration and settlement of foreigners in Yehud province; second, the involvement of those foreigners in the lives of the returnees; and lastly, what could be the possible driving socio-historical factors for the dismissal of such intermarriages?

Before we move to the first point, however, it is important to substantiate briefly our acknowledgment of the complexity of this chapter's content due to the lack of historical data. Both historians and biblical scholars have commonly admitted that to reconstruct the history of the Persian Empire in general and Yehud in particular has never been an easy assignment.² In his attempt to reconstruct the history of early Second Temple period, VanderKam (2001:186) was deeply concerned about this phenomenon when he commented, "As we have seen several times, our sources for the early centuries of the second temple period are especially meager". Because of that situation, far before VanderKam commented, Eskenazi (1992:42) concluded, "Without more documents from Judah, it is impossible to know for sure whether the Jewish women of Judah had privileges and obligations similar to those of their sisters in Elephantine." In the next paragraphs, we will outline at least four factors which contribute to this phenomenon.

First, it has been repeatedly mentioned in the course of this writing that most of the biblical texts are a play back of events which might have happened in the far past and, therefore, they are not entirely reliable for historical reconstruction. It might be true that most of the narratives are a projection of events which took place in the past, but they have been adjusted into the narrator's contemporary situation. Second, there are many documents about the

² Historians and biblical scholars who acknowledge the deficiency of resources for historical reconstruction of Judah include: Bird who observed that "The realm of religion is selected to exemplify the problems and possibilities of reconstructing women's lives in the absence of first-hand sources" (1994:31); Grabbe (2004:3) who stated, "We know much less about antiquity because of the much greater limits of sources"; Becking (2011:8) also supplemented, "There are, however, no sources from the Persian court that independently support the historical claims of the Book of Ezra". Gerstenberger (2011) is another scholar who valued the great work of the ancient Greek historians such as Herodotus, Xenophon, Thucydides, and Ktesias, to mention only four. These historians have collected as much data about the history of Babylonian, Persia and Greek Empires as they could. However, according to Gerstenberger, this data seems to reflect the world view of their collectors. In this case one should be very careful not to read them as if they were purely interpreted from the Middle Eastern point of view. Gerstenberger pointed out, "The Greek reporters convey their opinions on the Persian domestic affairs, colored, of course, by their own biases." Therefore, "The reconstruction of the historical course of events in Syria-Palestine is made more difficult because we scarcely have reliable data" (2011:37, 87). However, in his view, the work of these historians is more reliable than the canonical records.

history of the ancient societies, but most of them are not yet interpreted and published³. In other words, most of those documents are still in ancient and, probably, dead languages and therefore are in a situation that they cannot be read and understood by most of modern and ordinary scholars.

Third, it is asserted that, although there is a significant amount of sources about the historiography of the Persian period, in particular, there is almost nothing written about the Persian Province of Yehud, except the canonical texts. In fact, Grabbe (2004:118) lamented, “Unfortunately, no direct mention of Judah for this time seems to be found in the surviving classical sources.” This does not mean that the Persian documents are unable to bring forth any relevant information about Yehud. Of course they do, to some extent. Scholars such as Kessler (2008:18) have defended that there is no time in history that Judah lived in isolation from the rest of its surrounding world.⁴ To illuminate this point, in his response to Weinberg’s thesis which seems to advocate the existence of two different economies in ancient Yehud, that is, the religious and the political parties, which seemed to have emerged into one, Cataldo published an article entitled ‘Persian Policy and the Yehud Community During Nehemiah’ and contended that in one way or another the two parties should be viewed as one economy and not two, because “The struggle of the dominant party with those other groups which surrounded it serves to characterize this dominant party as members of a society larger than the group/party itself” (2003:245). This means that any research on Judah’s historiography, whether approached politically, socio-economically or religiously, has to be addressed within the entire context of the Persian Empire in particular and the Mediterranean Region in general.

The fourth and last factor for the complexity of this topic is related to the archaeological data. Although archaeology has proven itself to be one of the greatest and most important tools for historical reconstruction of the biblical world, scholars have equally admitted that it has its

³ Grabbe lamented, “Even today only a few specialists concentrate in this area, though interest is certainly much greater than it was. The result is that many of the Babylonian documents have not been published or are available only in autograph copies and thus not easily accessible to the non-specialist” (2004:111).

⁴ Just like any other people group in the Ancient Middle East, Judah was part of the entire region. This means that the concept of globalization which is always spoken about in our days should not be understood as something new; it was there even in the ancient days, though at a different level. Judah as a nation had an obligation and a privilege to be part of the ancient Mediterranean global world and therefore to be shaped by the ideologies of great powers of the day, such as Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and later the Roman Empire.

limitations. One limitation is that which scholars such as Wiseman and Yamauchi refer as the problem of ‘dating’⁵, and the other one is known as the problem of selectivity⁶, to mention only two. Archaeologists, historians, as well as politicians can consciously or unconsciously interpret archaeological data for their personal agenda⁷ – according to their political ambitions or religious beliefs. This is what Finkelstein (2007:53) meant when referring to the exodus event. He observed that “These data were fixed according to the conventional chronology of the Aegean pottery sequence, but this in turn was influenced by the Conquest stories in the Bible; another case of circular reasoning.” Blenkinsopp is another biblical scholar who has extensively elaborated this kind of weaknesses in his article ‘The Bible, Archaeology and Politics; or The Empty Land Revised’. After addressing some instances in which this scientific tool has not been properly used over the past decades, rather to defend political and ethnic agendas in Israel-Palestine controversy, he concluded with a very motivating question for further scholarly reflection on the subject, when he posed “Our survey, finally raises the question whether archaeology should allow itself to be co-opted into this process, or whether its task should not rather be that of contributing to the dissolution of false understanding of the past?” (2002:187). This rhetorical question and Finkelstein’s observation serve as a warning sign for all of us, Old Testament students, to be careful when we use the available and already interpreted and published archaeological data in our biblical

⁵ Wiseman and Yamauchi (1979:5) have acknowledged that one of the challenges archaeologists have in this area is being able to date their evidences, as they stated, “The value of archaeological evidences is greatly enhanced when it can be correlated with a definite time scale.”

⁶ Blenkinsopp (2002:178-179) has observed that the problem with archaeology is the selection of data. He summarized it as follows: “The problems begin with the presuppositions guiding the selection of data and the privileging of certain kinds of evidence. Selectivity is essential but inevitably problematic since it tends to dictate interpretation and predetermine conclusions.”

⁷ Archaeological data is just like any other ancient text; their meaning is mostly influenced by the readers’ world view and their personal intentions. This is the argument brought to the surface by Finkelstein and Mazar (2007:22-31) as they observed that when archaeologists interpret their finding, they do with the influence of their “personal values, beliefs, ideology and attitude.” In other words, scholars can use the archaeological data to approve or disprove some historical facts. On the one hand, minimalists can use this potential tool to reduce the biblical narratives to nothing but mere fictions. On the other hand, maximalists can use the same tool to propel a pure theological fact to be historically justified. Barstad (1996:51) commented, “Archaeologists working in Palestine, and later in Israel, have apparently committed the very same mistakes as their colleagues in biblical studies. By taking the information found in the Bible at face value, they have interpreted their archaeological finds uncritical in the light of the biblical texts.” The reason for this can supposedly be either political motivations, national agenda, or religious beliefs. No matter what the case might be, the point is that in most cases archaeologists do not evaluate their finds without bias; they are mostly influenced by their preconceptions. To avoid such mistakes, Finkelstein and Mazar insisted that archaeology should be defined as “a social-scientific discipline related to every aspect of human activity” (2007:22).

and historiographical studies. Having gone through these preliminary considerations, we move on to the first aspect – the myth of the empty land.

5.2. The Myth of the Empty Land

Up to this point, we still maintain the fact that the Mosaic Law, which is traditionally known as the Pentateuch, had always played an important role in decisions to be made or tradition to emerge in both pre- and postexilic communities of Israel. In the previous chapter, we have already indicated that the decision which the golah community had taken with regard to the issue of intermarriage, for instance, was greatly influenced by the Mosaic Law, more particularly the Deuteronomistic and the priestly traditions which emphasized monotheism and purity, respectively. In the present discussion, it is also important that we briefly address this topic – the Myth of the Empty Land, from the point of view of the Pentateuch tradition, and how it influenced the postexilic community.

It has been already mentioned in chapter three (cf. 3.5) that from a canonical point of view there were three basic elements in the whole concept of Israel's formation as a nation, namely, people, land and temple. Starting from Genesis 12, where the notion of Israel's creation seems to be conceived, we read that God commanded Abraham to leave his country and his father's household and go to a land which Abraham himself did not know. After his arrival in the land, Abraham was given a promise of a great nation (people) and of a land, as it reads, "To your offspring I will give this land" (v.7b). In response to this promise, Abraham "built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him" (v.7c). In this promise there is one aspect of special interest for our purpose. From the time the promise was uttered up to its fulfillment, the land of the promise has never been described as an empty land; there have been people living in the land and developing it. Genesis 12:6, for instance, states clearly that for the first time Abraham arrived in the land, there were people living in it – the Canaanites. Centuries later, when God decided to fulfill this promise, the land was still occupied. In Exodus 3:8b it is written, "So I have come down to rescue them [the Israelites] from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey – the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites." This passage brings us to an assumption that, on the one hand, the fulfillment of this promise was not going to be an easy task. The people living in the land were very well established, with big, strong and beautiful cities, a well-developed agricultural

system, and indeed an enjoyable life.⁸ In that case, it was, humanly speaking, obvious that the Israelites had to be militarily prepared in order to fight against those nations and occupy their land and their fortified cities. This seems to be the case during the occupation of the land, because both books of Joshua and Judges are replete of wars between the Israelites and the nations of the land.

On the other hand, the promise sounded like the land was going to be empty before the actual possession took place. God stated that He would drive away all the inhabitants from the land and leave it empty. “I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites” (Exodus 34:10-11). In other words, the battle against the nations of the land was going to be the Lord’s, as the Chronicler said, “Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s” (2 Chronicles 20:15b). The Lord was going to empty the land of its strong inhabitants and then let the Israelites settle in peacefully. This second phase of the promise – Yahweh being the one driving out the people from the land, seemed to dominate the whole concept of the Promised Land throughout the Mosaic tradition. The wars recorded in the books of Joshua and Judges seem to be part of the “נפלאות אשר לא-נבראו בכל-הארץ ובכל-הגוים” (wonders never done before in the whole earth and in all nations), which are spoken about in Exodus 34:10. In fact, when reading Joshua 10-22, with all the conquests in favor of the Israelites and the peaceful distribution of the land, one might be tempted to come to an impression that the land was indeed empty when the Israelites occupied and distributed it among themselves. This is how the Pentateuch tradition portrayed the concept of the promise of the land – it was occupied and yet empty. Now the question which follows is: what influence did this concept have to the understanding of the postexilic community? Both biblical scholars and archaeologists have approached this topic

⁸ The life of the people living in the land is described in the book of Deuteronomy 6:10-11, “When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you – a land with large, flourishing cities, you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant...” The implication of these great and strong settlements is that Israel would have to face strong and very equipped military groups in order to occupy their land and properties. Gerstenberger (2002:21) has argued that the more people come together in great settlements, the more they need a very organized and sophisticated military sphere for protection. In fact, when we read 1 Samuel 8 we understand that the reason the Israelites asked for a king was that they needed a military system that would defend them from outside attacks. This is why we stated above that, unlike the hypothesis given by Alt and North (1993:104) about the theory of a peaceful settlement, the fulfillment of the promise was not going to be a peaceful one. With regard to the life of the peoples in the land portrayed in the text, I will add one note. It is important that we do not read the text literally, because the book of Judges, in particular, seems to present a different context, a non-agricultural society.

from different propositions out of which only two will be addressed in this study – purity versus pollution and archaeological perspectives. Before we move to this discussion, we shall briefly look at this same topic within the postexilic tradition.

Like the Pentateuch tradition, the information we find in both exilic and postexilic sources, such as 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah, Ezra and Nehemiah seem to be two sided. On the one hand, these sources portray the deportation to Babylon as an absolute event. In other words, Nebuchadnezzar had taken all the Israelites into exile, destroyed all the cities and houses, and demolished the walls. In 2 Kings 24:14, for instance, the writers stated, that “He [Nebuchadnezzar] carried into exile all Jerusalem: all the officers, and fighting men, and all the craftsmen, and artisans – a total of ten thousand.” The impression we get when we read this verse is that the word “all” means total, complete, no exception, nobody was left. Then we are tempted to conclude that Nebuchadnezzar swept the whole land of Judah, carried all the people to Babylon, leaving not even one single person in the land. Barstad (1996:31), however, avoided this type of reading and suggested a different understanding of the term “all”, when he said, “When the ancient writer says ‘all the people’ he does not mean ‘all the people,’ but a large number. And when he refers to a large number, this may simply be because he wants to make a point with regard to the importance of what had happened.” In this case, according to Barstad, the term ‘all’ does not necessarily mean ‘total’ or ‘complete’; it means many people were taken to Babylon.

Jeremiah 39 confirms the information in 2 Kings 24:14 and gives further details which characterize this occurrence more seriously than what is said in 2 Kings 24. For that reason, Carroll (1992:80) classifies Jeremiah’s account as “brutal realism” from the point that Jeremiah portrays the whole event as if the Babylonians had no sense of mercy on anybody they found in Jerusalem and the surroundings. Nebuchadnezzar and his army “שחט” (slaughtered) all the royal members, “עור” (blinded) King Zedekiah, burnt all the houses and the city, and carried to Babylon all the people that had remained. Later, after all this, Jeremiah reports that those who had either escaped from Nebuchadnezzar’s actions of vandalism or were purposely left in the land to take care of the vineyards and the fields (39:10), fled to Egypt “to escape the Babylonians” (Jer. 41:18a). According to this perspective, Carroll (1992:80) commented, “Thus the Judean territory was emptied of ‘humankind and beast’ (Jer. 36:29) and, in the words of the Chronicler, ‘kept the Sabbath to fulfill seventy years’ (2 Chr. 36:21)”. This is one account of the Babylonian deportation.

On the other hand, the same sources seem to accept the fact that the land was not totally emptied. By the time the deportees returned to their home country there were people living in the land⁹. In his attempt to distinguish between the two groups ‘the returned exiles’ and ‘the people of the land’, Farisani (2003:35) stated, “The *am haaretz* are those Jews who did not go into Babylonian exile but stayed in Palestine.” This is to welcome the hypothesis that there were people of Abrahamic lineage, described as *am haaretz*, who did not go into exile; they remained in the land until the return of their brothers and sisters from exile. In this light, one could also suggest that even some of those who migrated to Egypt, according to 2 Kings 25:26 and Jeremiah 39:10 might have come back after that particular period of political instability. In fact, Ben Zvi (2003:32) commented, “Nor should one ignore, for instance, that the historical deportation was never total and, accordingly, that the actual population of Yehud included not only recent immigrants but also those who lived in neo-Babylonian Judah and their descendants.”

Besides, the fact that both Ezra’s and Nehemiah’s writings mention, though negatively, the presence of the peoples of the land, who were classified as enemies of Judah and Benjamin (Ezra 4:1), it is a clear evidence that at least by the time the returnees arrived in Judah there were people living in the land. Blenkinsopp (2002:177) commented, “But we hear of non-immigrants admitted to the celebration of Passover after renouncing idolatry (6:21), and elsewhere it is rather a question of the myth of the empty land...” Cataldo (2003:249) is another scholar who approached this topic from an archaeological point of view and argued that “various discovered coins and seals bearing the 777 impression confirm the existence of a distinct province known as Yehuda.” Apparently, some of these coins and seals were produced during the exilic period. In short, both the pre- and postexilic traditions seem to admit that the concept of the land of the promise was two sided – the land was empty yet fully inhabited. This takes us back to our topic – the influence of the Pentateuch tradition to the postexilic understanding of the concept of the empty land.

Our present discussion will be mainly based on two articles, namely ‘The Myth of the Empty Land’ by Robert P. Carroll, and ‘The Bible, Archaeology and Politics; The Empty Land

⁹ Both Ezra and Nehemiah talk of opposition from the peoples of the land. These people claimed to be living in the land, worshiping and making sacrifices to the same God as that of the returnees and therefore wanted to be part of the reconstruction of the temple (Ezra 4:2b).

Revised' by Joseph Blenkinsopp. After a significant exposition of biblical evidences about the concept of the empty land¹⁰, Carroll argued that the ideology of the empty land was an outcome of priestly tradition – purity against pollution, which tended to “control membership in the new community”¹¹. The land without Yahweh is polluted and, therefore, the people living in it are contaminated and absent in the sight of the unpolluted ones – the people of the promise. According to Carroll, although the contaminated ones seem to occupy a geographical space, that space remains empty simply because the occupants cannot perform the normal activities as those of the purity.¹² That is why in both pre- and postexilic traditions the presence of people in the land seems to be invisible.

Moreover, Carroll associates the ideology of purity versus pollution with the concept of the Sabbaths¹³. Leviticus 26:34-35 reads, “Then the land will enjoy its Sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies... All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the Sabbaths you lived in it.” In this sense, the Babylonian exile means Sabbath for the land of Judah.¹⁴ The idea behind this ideology is that all those who worked the land (not only in agricultural sense but also ceremonially) were out, and the land therefore took its rest until the return.

The third element Carroll brings into this discussion has to do with power and authority. An important aspect we may notice within the Pentateuch tradition is that the people of the promise seem to hold power and authority over those around them. This can be seen right from the time Moses was called and sent to Egypt to bring the Israelites to the Promised Land. First, in these narratives Moses is portrayed as having more power and authority than Pharaoh himself; with all the twelve plagues described in Exodus 7-11, Pharaoh seemed powerless and even absent, though present. Second, the journey from Egypt to Canaan is presented in a way that it portrays the Israelites as more powerful than all the nations they have encounter along the way. To illustrate this point, Blenkinsopp (2002:173), in his

¹⁰ Carroll (1992:80-81).

¹¹ Carroll (1992:79).

¹² Carroll (1992: 83).

¹³ Carroll (1992: 83).

¹⁴ Blenkinsopp (2002:176) commented that “The ideology is inscribed in the idea, expressed in Chronicles and Leviticus, that after the fall of Jerusalem the land observed its Sabbaths for 70 years as it lays desolate and unpopulated (2 Chronicles 36:20-21; Leviticus 26:34-35).”

analysis of some of the rabbinic writings, observed that some of them suggest that Joshua and his troops might not have fought against the peoples of the land. Instead, “The Canaanites and Amorites voluntarily surrendered the land to the Israelites”. This perspective had influenced greatly the understanding of the postexilic community in relation to the land of promise. As discussed in the previous chapters, those from the exile claimed to have received both earthly and divine powers over those in the land; the *golah* community was literally, politically, economically, and spiritually stronger than those in the land.

In fact, Carroll brings a very good point into this discussion– the contrast between the good and the bad figs¹⁵ from Jeremiah 24. According to Jeremiah, the first deportation which included King Jeconiah represents the good figs. These are strong, full of life and hope; they are the seed of Abraham who are to sprout in the land. Whereas those deported together with King Zedekiah and the rest who were scattered in and outside the land stand for the bad figs. These are corrupt, powerless, hopeless, and lifeless figs and are therefore eliminated permanently. That is why their presence during and after the deportation was invisible and even Cyrus, in his edict, could not count on them for anything. They did not exist at all. Carroll summarized the whole point with regard to the power held by the returnees as follows, “Great wealth also endowed the returning deportees, so that their appearance in the ravaged land accompanied by such enormously conspicuous wealth must have set them apart from the local inhabitants and have given rise to considerable opportunity for social oppression” (1992:81). One could add in this summary that the coming of Ezra with the Law of Moses and an official document from Cyrus had granted him and his group – the people of the temple, religious and political power and authority.

With regard to the second perspective, both Blenkinsopp (2002) and Barstad (1996) are among other biblical scholars who have contributed significantly to this topic. In response to the canonical narratives and to some of the archaeological finds which support the hypothesis of empty land as a result of complete destruction of Judah by the Babylonians, these scholars have defended that most of the cities that are reported to have been completely destroyed by the Babylonians is not archaeologically justifiable. About Jerusalem, for example, Blenkinsopp (2002:184) asserted, “Coming finally to Judah, Jerusalem is a clear and well-

¹⁵ Carroll (1992: 81).

documented case. The destruction of ‘that rebellious city hurtful to kings and provinces, (Ezra 4:15) was a deliberate, ideological act, and its effects are clearly inscribed in the archaeological records. But perhaps even for Jerusalem the evidence is not so clear-cut and definitive.’ Barstad (1996:47) is another scholar who agrees with the canonical narratives that Judah had been indeed assaulted by the Babylonians and its inhabitants taken into exile. However, he sustains that the destruction and deportation were not total; some parts of the province were not affected and perhaps its inhabitants were not moved to another place. He stated, “Whereas the archaeological evidence from such sites as Jerusalem, Tell Beit Mirsim, Beth-Shemesh, Lachish, and Ramat Rachel shows clear traces of the destruction brought about by Nebuchadnezzar’s campaign in the west, settlements in the northern part of Judah and Benjamin were not affected by the event.” All this is to indicate that there is no doubt about the historicity of the Babylonian exile. However, the so-called hypothesis of the “empty land” is a pure myth. The Babylonians neither destroyed all the cities, nor did they deport all Jerusalem (Judah and Benjamin) into exile.

In short, modern archaeologists together with biblical scholars propose that the Babylonian deportation was not total; the land was never emptied of its inhabitants as portrayed by the canonical narratives. To this point, Kessler (2008:121) commented, “It is certain that the later picture of the complete emptying of the Land is historically untenable.”¹⁶ Again this piece of information leads us to believe that the whole concept of the empty land had to do with the priestly tradition – purity against pollution, authority of the temple people, and Sabbatical rest of the land. The Promised Land was polluted through the presence of the contaminated peoples of the land, and the only way it could be purified was through the presence of and its occupation by the “seed of Abraham”. Moreover, the land was on its Sabbatical rest for the entire period of exile. It rested from all the activities performed only by those who had been taken to exile, the good figs, the ones with the authority to purify the land, as Carroll (1992:91) has correctly articulated, “The holy community living in the holy city in the holy land must keep itself separate from all outsiders (the peoples of the land) so as not to endanger itself by further exposure to YHWH’s wrath against such pollutant forces.” The abolition of intermarriage therefore was the best possible means for the achievement of this

¹⁶ Esler (2003:430) is among many other modern biblical scholars who believe that the Babylonians did not deport the whole population to exile.

religious goal. Having mentioned the abolition of intermarriage, the canonical text portrays these divorced women as “נכריות” (foreign); Sanballat as a Samaritan and Tobiah as an Amorite (Nehemiah 4:1-3); Geshem as an Arab (Nehemiah 6:1); and other people who claimed to have been brought in the land by Esarhaddon king of Assyria (Ezra 4:2). Should one think of a situation in which besides the poorest of the land who were left behind to work the vineyard and fields (2 Kings 25:12), there were other people who migrated in from other ethnic and geographical nations? This is the question we shall consider in the following paragraphs.

5.3. The Migratory Phenomenon

One of the top issues which greatly affects humanity in the 21st century world is refugee migration. On the one hand, people, known as economic refugees, move either individually or in small groups from rural areas to urban places or from poor countries to rich states in search of opportunities for a better life. On the other hand, large multitudes of men, women and children, leaving behind or even having lost all or part of their family members, relatives, belongings and properties, run from one place to another, from one country to another, even from one continent to another in search of places of safety. Samuel and Sugden (1987:12) observed that though there might be other factors which justify this phenomenon, the most crucial one is political instability in our societies. They stated as follows, “Refugee moments are a by-product of political destabilization.” The present writing will consider this quotation in order to argue that whenever there is any crisis, whether economic, political, or of any other nature, which puts the lives of the people at risk there is always a migratory phenomenon. People are displaced from one geographical area to another in order to save their lives. This was, without a doubt, the case in the ancient Middle East during the Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian political conflict in the 7th, 6th and 5th centuries B.C. In fact, Gerstenberger commented:

The historical events of the sixth and fifth century B.C.E. in the Near East precipitated extensive population migrations that we are only marginally able to know or reconstruct. Like many of their contemporaries in other regions, people in the tiny province of Judah were kept on the run by the armies of the major powers, as well as

by marauders of small neighboring people groups, by economic and natural catastrophes.¹⁷

Gerstenberger does not concentrate on the phenomenon of migration for only Judah. Instead, he presents a historical picture which considers the entire Mediterranean region. In this case, one could suggest that these migrations were not one-sided; there were both outward and inward migratory movements. People moved from any place they felt vulnerable to wherever they felt their lives would be safer. Based in some archaeological finds, it has been asserted that soon after the invasion of the Northern Kingdom - Israel, by the Assyrians around 722 - 721 B.C., the population in Judah increased significantly due to the great numbers of immigrants who took refuge in the Southern Kingdom.¹⁸ The same is said to have happened when the southern kingdom was assaulted by the Babylonians. Archaeologists Finkelstein and Mazar (2007:51) noted that “After the destruction of Judah, Edomites settled in the southern parts of the vanquished state, in the Beer-Sheba Valley and in the Hebron hills...”¹⁹ Moreover, as mentioned in the previous paragraphs, most of the Babylonian assaults and brutal killings did not have much impact in the rural areas, because the target of the invaders was mostly the strategic places such as palaces, temples, and commercial centers. In this case, it is possible that there were also great migratory movements from those key places to those remote areas. However, this does not change the fact that from Iron II Era onward the Middle East significantly experienced the formation of big urban settlements.²⁰ A more likely possibility is that the remote areas could be places where immigrants made friendly negotiations with the local residents, perhaps through marriages or other kind of business, and settled there permanently.²¹

The canonical text also supports the migratory phenomenon during this period. We have already indicated in the previous paragraphs that when those in the land (also known as the

¹⁷ Gerstenberger (2011:126).

¹⁸ Stiebing (2003:286) commented that the population of the Southern Kingdom of Judah had doubled because of such massive migration of those from the Northern Kingdom.

¹⁹ Blenkinsopp (2002:186), however, argues that Edomites had settled in the southern part of Jerusalem even before the Babylonian invasion. This argument raises the possibility that the destruction of this part of Jerusalem is likely be attributed to the Edomites and not to the Babylonian, since it is suspected to happen early in the 6th century B.C.

²⁰ For full discussion see Gerstenberger (2011:76-79).

²¹ There is no archaeological evidence to prove this point. It should be therefore read as my personal assumption.

enemies of Judah and Benjamin) approached the returnees and asked if they could be part of the project of rebuilding the temple, their point was, like the returnees, they had been seeking the same God and sacrificing to him ever since they were brought into the land by Esarhaddon king of Assyria (Ezra 4:1-2). These people are fully described in 2 Kings 17:24-27. Though the Chronicler seems to locate this group of people not in Judah but in Samaria, one could also suggest that they lived in the northern part of Judah. Our interest in this passage, however, is not necessarily the place they were relocated; it is rather the fact that these people were brought from different nations, such as Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamah and Sepharvaim. It is reported that when they settled in the land, they did not know anything about the God of the Jews until the king of Assyria sent back to Samaria one of the priests who was taken captive to teach them what the local deity required from his worshipers. Curcio (2010:173) classifies these people as being “Samaritan Jews who were interbred with Assyrians who were relocated to the Northern Kingdom after its fall.”²² If this is the case, one can suggest that by the time these “enemies of Judah and Benjamin” went to the returnees and offered their help, they had been already taught about the God of the Jews and perhaps were Yahweh worshipers. Blenkinsopp (1998:29) approached this episode from the political point of view when he said, “After the conquest of Samarian, the Assyrians insisted on bringing back one of the deported priests and installing him in Bethel, in the interest of good order.”

Another migratory movement is found in Jeremiah 41:16-18. We have already mentioned this passage previously. However, its importance for our purpose at this point is the reason behind the migration. The text says that it was after the assassination of Gedaliah the appointee of the Babylonian emperor to the governing office in the province of Yehud. Because of this barbarous murder, the local people were afraid that the Babylonian authorities would take revenge against all who were known as the poorest of the land. The only alternative for them was to migrate to the Negev. One can try to imagine how chaotic the Mediterranean Region

²² Blenkinsopp (1998:26) argues that it was highly possible that after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, the worship continued; it did not stop, as it seems to be the case in the canonical text. Blenkinsopp bases his argument on Jeremiah 41:4-5 where it is reported that about eighty people from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria were murdered on their way to the house of the Lord. Assuming that the house of the Lord referred to the temple in Jerusalem, he commented, “Few stopped to ask whether, in light of what we know of Samaria-Jerusalemite relations before and after this point in time, it was at all likely that people would come from Samaria bringing offerings to Jerusalem.”

was in that epoch, as we hear now and again of incidents of brutal assassination of individuals, of groups of people, even of political leaders. One may not believe that the concept and practice of revolts is not just something of the modern world; it started back in the ancient days. For example, after giving an extensively comprehensive description of political struggles and revolts during the Persian period, Berquist (1995:106) commented, “Law and order broke throughout most of the more distant colonies, and Artaxerxes could not dispatch the army to quell all the disputes.” This is the socio-political situation of the exilic and postexilic Jewish community. Now we shall move to the next search – namely marriage between returnees and those in the land.

5.4. Marriage in the Ancient Near East

In the introduction of this chapter, we have mentioned the complexity of reconstructing the history of the pre- and postexilic periods, due to the insufficiency of primary and reliable sources. However, from the fact that, as pointed out previously, Yehud has never been in isolation from the rest of the Ancient Near East, it is possible to have an idea of its history through extra biblical sources. Many biblical scholars have used this road on their journey to reconstructing the biblical world and society. Eskenazi, for example, used the Elephantine documents to write and publish the article ‘Out of the Shadow: Biblical Women in the Postexilic Era’. In this article, Eskenazi concluded that by learning about the marital status and the role of the postexilic women in the Jewish community of Elephantine, it would be possible to know, even if not for sure, the marital status and the role of the postexilic women of Judah. When she posed the question whether those in Elephantine shared their experience with the ones in Judah, she remarked, “The evidence suggests that they probably did” (1992:42). Guenther’s article ‘A Typology of Israelite Marriage: Kinship, Socio-Economic, and Religious Factors’ is another example. In this article, Guenther used the biblical text to analyze the semantic potentials of the biblical language which portrays different types of marriage in different settings. At the end of his study, Guenther concluded that there were different types of marriages, and each type was appropriate to a certain socio-historical context. Knowing all this information helps one understand why the postexilic people behaved the way they did and made decisions they made. We will, therefore, make use of these and other publications to address this topic, starting with marriage in the Palestinian Jewish community, and then in the Diaspora.

5.4.1. Marriage in the Palestinian Jewish Community

In his introduction, Guenther (2005:404-5) proposed that in the Ancient Near East in general and pre- and postexilic Israel, in particular, marriage had served as a multifunctional instrument: 1) to retain family wealth for common use of the respective family members; 2) to keep the continuation of one's lineage; 3) to create peace and friendship between different families or ethnic groups; 4) to promote religious tolerance; and 5) to seek economic survival. The last three functions are of interest to this topic. However, we shall start by briefly looking at the first two. According to Guenther (2005:388), the very basic concept of marriage in an ancient Israel community is described by two verbs – 'נתן' (give) and 'לקח' (take). When a woman/girl, who is still under the responsibility and care of her parents, gets married, it is the privilege of her father or of the oldest man in the family to give her to the bridegroom. In this process of giving her, it is equally the responsibility and privilege of the groom to take her from her father or the one performing the act of giving. This is what Foerster (1964:127) meant when he said, "The patriarchal social order was manifested here in the fact that the father gave his daughter to a man for wife."²³

However, Ebeling (2010:83) approaches this issue of giving a daughter from the canonical point of view and suggests that the giving of one's daughter to a man for a wife does not mean the targeted woman/girl did not have the right to say 'yes' or 'no'. Ebeling gave an example of Rebekah, in Genesis 24:57-59. Rebekah's brother and mother asked her if she was willing to go up to Canaan and get married there, and she responded positively. The mere fact that they first asked her if she was willing to go or not, gives a high probability that if she had given a negative answer, her brother and mother would not force her to marry Isaac. Back to the 'give and take' type of marriage, there are basically two important characteristics. One, there is an exchange of gifts between the two parties – the bride price and dowry;²⁴ and two, the bride has to be either a close relative to or a member of an extended family of the

²³ Ebeling (2010:83) suggested that in some cases, though the general concept of giving and taking is male oriented, women also were involved in marriage arrangements. Ebeling gives an example of Hagar who negotiated the marriage of her son Ismael in Genesis 21:21.

²⁴ According to Ebeling (2010:83), a dowry was a gift from the bride to the family of her new husband. This could be even a land, in case of rich families as that of Solomon who married Pharaoh's daughter and was given the city of Gezer (1 Kings 9:16). The bride price was a gift from the groom to the household of the bride's father.

groom²⁵. This was, according to Guenther (2005:389), to ensure that there was “social equality and preservation of the family wealth...” In other words, all the gifts, including properties would stay within the family’s circle. The second type of marriage practiced in ancient Israelite culture is known as levirate.²⁶ The purpose of this type of marriage is to fulfill the social duty of one’s deceased brother. The only thing which makes this type of marriage unique is that “It becomes the responsibility of the levir to have a son by the widow to maintain the dead man’s name on his inheritance... That child would be reckoned as the descendant of the deceased brother” (Guenther, 2005:399). This is exactly what happened with Boaz, Ruth and Naomi. The son born of Ruth was no longer hers; he was Naomi’s son as it reads, “Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. The women living there said, ‘Naomi has a son’” (Ruth 4:16-17).

With regard to the last three types of marriage brought to us by Guenther, the first one has the verbal root התן which carries the semantic function of ‘intermarriage’; it creates a relationship between two ethnic groups or two different families.²⁷ Guenther used the episode in Genesis 34 – about Jacob’s daughter Dinah and Shechem, the Hivite, to illustrate this type of marriage. When the Shechemites discovered that Jacob’s sons were very angry with them because of what they did to their sister Dinah, they proposed a marriage, hoping to create peace and friendship between the two ethnic groups. The Jacobites accepted the proposal on one condition – “That you become like us by circumcising all your males. Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We will settle among you and become one people with you” (vv.15-16). More than the marriage they had proposed, the Shechemites had another intention – they also wanted to share the wealth that was brought in their land by the Jacobites. “Won’t their livestock, their property and all their animals become ours? So, let us give our consent to them, and they will settle among us” (v.23). In this case, on the one hand, the Shechemites wanted to use marriage first, to create peace and friendship with Jacob and his sons; and second, they wanted to have a share from the Jacobites’ wealth. On the other hand, the Jacobites accepted the marriage proposal not only if their counterparts

²⁵ In chapter 4.2.1 of this study we have given several examples of this type of marriage. We indicated that Abraham married Sarah, his step-sister; Isaac married Rebekah, his grandniece; Jacob married his cousins Leah and Rachel.

²⁶ See a very brief discussion in Guenther (2005:399). We have also addressed this type of marriage in chapter 4.4.1, though not from the approach taken by Guenther.

²⁷ Guenther (2005:390).

would be circumcised, but also in order that they become one people with the Shechemites and have a right to use their land. The question now is what was the significance of the circumcision? Though Guenther admits the fact that the text is not clear whether it was a religious or cultural practice, he suggests that it favors more the religious function. Guenther (2005:392) based his argument on other biblical texts such as 1 Kings 3:1 which read, “Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh King of Egypt ‘ויתחתן’ (and intermarried) his daughter”, the verb ‘חתן’ (intermarry) has a religious function, as he pointed out, “Indeed, it appears to simply that the spouses will respect their partner’s disparate religious commitments as part of the agreement of mutual respect and peaceful co-existence”.

The other type of marriage, according to Guenther (2005:399), is נשא, which also means intermarriage, but it takes the connotation of ‘stealing’. The word ‘stealing’ does not necessarily mean that the marriage takes place secretly or they marry forcefully, though sometimes it may take that meaning, as it seems to be the case in Judges 21:20-23. Generally speaking, all the necessary negotiations between the two parties would be carefully followed until a common agreement is reached. The stealing in this case is in the sense “that there is no exchange of dowry or bride price or any of the other retributions of wealth that normally takes place in a normal marriage.” Guenther argues that this is the kind of marriage found in Ezra 9:2 and Nehemiah 13:25. In Ezra 9:2, for example, it reads, “כִּי־נִשְׂאוּ מִבְּנוֹתֵיהֶם”, literally meaning “they stole their daughters”. Here we can notice that the verb used ‘נשא’ (steal, carry, lift) is different from ‘לקח’ (take) as referred in the first basic type of marriage in the Jewish culture. The actions of ‘giving’ and ‘taking’ were part and parcel with the giving of the bride price and the taking of the dowry, whereas the carrying/stealing of a wife had nothing to do with gift giving. Guenther (2005:401) argues that this might be the case with the intermarriages in Ezra-Nehemiah, as “both use נשא to refer to the act of marrying but the context, explicitly or implicitly, indicates that the reference is to foreign wives.” The last type of marriage is הָשִׁיב, which means to cohabit,²⁸ and it carries the implication that the husband and the wife are not bound to live together for the rest of their lives; they can be separated at any time and for any reason. The basic characteristic of this kind of marriage has to do with individual right to get married or to cohabit with a partner of his/her choice. In this case, like

²⁸ Guenther proposes that this type of marriage is not bound by the divine vow ‘Till death part us’; both parties are aware that one day the marriage can be dismissed. In this case, in all what they do, they bear in mind that one day their marriage will, for any reason, come to an end.

in the previous two types of marriage, the customs of ‘giving and taking’ and ‘bride price and dowry’ are not practiced. In case of divorce, each partner had the right to take what he/she brought as well as his/her share of half of the property acquired together.²⁹ It is possible therefore that the divorce of the women in Ezra-Nehemiah was from this type of marriage - the cohabitation. After the divorce each partner went away with half of his/her property.

Having addressed the five types of marriages, we can notice that in Ezra-Nehemiah’s context the “לקח – נתן” type of marriage was probably not as functional as it seemed to be in the pre-exilic period. When the returnees came back from the exile, where they had been for seventy years, their land had been owned by other people, such as those described as the poorest of the land, the Samaritans who had migrated after the Assyrian’s assault, the Edomites who had settled in the southern parts of the vanquished state, in the Beer-Sheba Valley and in the Hebron hills, and so forth. In fact, Berquist (1995:106) gives a brief description of another perspective about the ownership of the land in the following terms: “Local landowners became bankrupt and lost their land, and in most cases Persians became the new landlords.”³⁰

Now the situation of the returnees in this regard is stated here by Douglas:

But the returned exiles would absolutely have needed vineyards, olive plantations, farms for pasture and cereal growing. Without well-established rights to the land they would soon run out of funds and perhaps even be reduced to working as laborers. On the most favorable scenario, their old family lands would still be worked by their local kinsfolk. Consequently they needed to make very close links with their relatives. Marriage was the obvious way for the new arrivals to insert themselves into the farming economy.³¹

At that point the returnees faced at least three challenges. First, they were immigrants in the land of their ancestors; second, they needed to establish peace and friendship with those

²⁹ Guenther (2005:40) suggests that when the expression אֲתֵּיהוּדִים הַשִּׁיבֹו נָשִׁים, which literally means “the Judeans dwelled with women” in Nehemiah 13:23, is associated with the phrase “and וּבְנֵיהֶם חָצִי (half of their children) spoke the language of Ashdod”, it can be deduced that the idea behind this type of marriage was the division of the property into 50/50, in case of divorce.

³⁰ The Persians had conquered and took over the land. Douglas (2002:11) asserted, “Originally, land could be acquired by conquest or inheritance.” McNutt (1999:169) argues that due to high rate of taxes demanded by the Persian Empire, most of the local Judean had sold their land to the rich ones - “the nobles and officials” (Nehemiah 5: 7). It was therefore on these bases that Nehemiah cried for social and economic reforms, in Nehemiah 5.

³¹ This quotation is taken from Douglas (2002:11). Gale A. Yee (2003:143) when she stated, “One of the earliest economic issues facing the immigrants was land tenure and gaining control of the principal means of production in Yehud from the natives.”

already in the land; and third, they needed land for their permanent settlement. This is where *חתן* (intermarriage) become the viable solution.³² However, this type of marriage meant more than peace and friendship. As mentioned above, the *חתן* has religious implications –tolerance. For example, Solomon was a full believer and worshiper of Yahweh, but at the same time he accommodated the religions of his foreign wives to the point that in the same way that he built a temple for Yahweh, he did for each of his wives’ deity. The same applied to the exiles. Soon they engaged in the *חתן* type of marriage, they had the obligation to tolerate the religions of their foreign wives. It is in this situation that Guenther (2005:394) posed a very difficult and yet practical question: “How could the religious leadership function with integrity when they themselves had agreed to permit and respect the worship of foreign gods by their wives?” I believe even Ezra had failed to find a different answer, rather than the decision he made together with other leaders of the community – to dismiss those intermarriages. But now this solution leaves us, modern readers, uncertain about the whole situation. Was the abolition of those intermarriages as peaceful as it sounds to be in the canonical texts? Certainly, this is not an easy question, because of one main reason – we do not hear the voice of the victims. However, as we attempt to address the question above, we will first agree with Farisani (2003:47) when he said, “The fact that we do not hear their cry does not mean that they did not cry nor does it mean that they approved their oppression...”

5.4.2. Marriage in the Diaspora

Traditionally, the term diaspora refers to the 8th - 6th centuries B.C. great movements of the Jewish community to various gentile nations, such as Syria, Persia, Babylonia, Egypt, and so on.³³ This study will not consider all these places, but will rather focus the attention on one community – the Jewish community of Elephantine in Egypt. Motivated by the choice of this particular community, first, I would agree with Gerstenberger (2011:126) on the fact that unlike places such as Babylon and Syria where the Jews went as political prisoners,³⁴ “The

³² The returnees were aware of their situation. Therefore “A feature of the *חתן* treaty was its provision of amity. Peaceful co-existence of the restoration community with the surrounding people is indicated as one of the goals of their intermarriage” (Guenther, 2005:394).

³³ The definition of the term ‘Diaspora’ was taken from The Concise Oxford Dictionary. The New Edition for the 1990s.

³⁴ Two major differences between the Jewish community in Babylonia and that in Egypt are here described by Kessler (2008:127). One, Kessler argues that those who went to Babylonia were politically forced and had hope that one day they would come back home. While those who migrated to Egypt did it voluntarily and made Egypt

biblical tradition is filled with indications that over time Egypt was considered a sanctuary offering food and protection.” Second, in addition to the archaeological finds in the Holy Land and those of the Dead Sea, Elephantine is also an important site which has contributed significantly to a better knowledge of the ancient Jewish community.³⁵ For example, Gerstenberger (2011:127) has pointed out a significant number of letters discovered in Elephantine, of which two archives belonging to two private families were specifically about marriage, property and loan contracts. These are the artifacts that help us understand the history of the biblical world. We now move to such archives and try to find out how different or similar these marriages were from those in the Second Temple Palestine.

Recent studies have indicated that there were cases of intermarriage in the Jewish community of Elephantine. At least two cases have been identified. However, they do not deny the existence of many, as Sebastian Grätz (2011:197) has pointed out, “The Aramean Quarter of Elephantine housed many nations and religions within a limited area. Therefore, this unique kind of cohabitation could have advanced the phenomenon of intermarriage in a way which cannot be observed elsewhere in these times.” One case of these intermarriages is known as Mibtahiah, a Judean who married to an Egyptian, and the other one is about Tapmut, an Egyptian lady who married a free Jewish man. Starting with the former, there are three interesting aspects for the scope of this study. The first aspect is that before Mibtahiah got married, her father had entitled her a property, which included a house. The second aspect is that when she got married, her Egyptian husband stayed with her in her own house. From here one can argue that Mibtahiah had more economic power than her husband.

The third aspect has to do with her second marriage to a reasonably rich man. In this marriage, her husband and her father had signed a contract of marriage,³⁶ where both her

their permanent home. The other difference is marked by the fact that those in Egypt, being convinced that Elephantine was their home, they felt it was also a place which their deity could dwell and, therefore, they built a temple. According to Gerstenberger (2011:127) the name of the deity of the Jews in Elephantine was Yahu, and he believes this is probably the derivation of the name ‘Yahweh’. Those in Babylonia failed even to sing joyous song, because they felt they were in a foreign land; Jerusalem was the only land where Yahweh dwelled.

³⁵ Archaeological information has improved considerable the knowledge in the area of social life of the Jewish community in Elephantine. In recognition of this fact, Eskenazi (1992:28) maintained that “Dozens of original contracts, family archives, letters and ostraca written during this period have been discovered in Elephantine since the nineteenth century”.

³⁶ For a copy of the contract between Mibtahiah’s father Mahseiah and her husband, see Gerstenberger (2011:130-131).

personal belonging and those of her husband were listed. Moreover, this marriage tends to accommodate at least two of the types of marriage listed above. On the one hand, it followed the procedures of the *נתן – לקה* type of which the father gives his daughter and the bridegroom takes her. On the other hand, it also took the shape of a *השיב* type marriage. The content of the contract – “Should Miptahiah³⁷ stand up in an assembly and say: ‘I hate Eshor my husband’”³⁸ shows that Mibtahiah and her husband were cohabiting, and each one was prepared to have his/her share in case of divorce or marriage abuse, as Eskenazi (1992:29) has stated it right, “The contract shows that Mibtahiah’s belongings remain hers, regardless of marriage.” With regard to the second case, it is about a Jewish man Ananiah, a servitor in the temple of YHW,³⁹ who had married Tapmut, an Egyptian slave of a certain Jewish man named Meshullam. The first thing scholars have always pointed out about this marriage is the fact that, though not identified as a priest, Ananiah was a servitor, an officer⁴⁰ in the Temple of Yahu. This leads to an assumption that the situation of Ananiah was not different from that in Palestine in the Second Temple period, where even the temple officers were involved in intermarriages. The second thing scholars have been interested in about the case of Tapmut is the written negotiation between Ananiah and Meshullam about Tapmut’s marriage. From these two cases, one can conclude that there were more similarities between the two communities than differences, and one of the reasons is clearly stated by Eskenazi (1992:32). After asking the question as to whether there were similarities between the Egyptian Judaism⁴¹ and the Palestinian one, she concluded:

I contend that there was continuity during this Persian period between the practices in one Jewish community and another when both were under the same Persian imperial government, and communication was relatively easy and contracts were frequent. Furthermore, there are reasons to suppose that the marriage documents from Elephantine reflect Mesopotamian rather than distinctly Egyptian customs...⁴²

³⁷ There are different spellings. Some spell it Mibtahiah and others Miptahiah.

³⁸ This quotation was extracted from Mibtahiah’s contract marriage in Gerstenberger (2011:131).

³⁹ YHW is an abbreviation of Yahu the chief deity of the Elephantine Jewish community.

⁴⁰ Eskenazi (1992:29) believes that though the term *להן* (servitor) is unclear, to some extent it means official.

⁴¹ The term Judaism here is in the sense of Hebrew Bible traditions and the respective communities.

⁴² Eskenazi (1992:31-32).

If this was the case, the question which arises is what then motivated this social crisis to happen only in the Palestinian Jewish community, and nothing heard from the one in Elephantine. The following paragraphs will explore this question.

5.5. Possible Reasons for the Abolition of Intermarriages in Ezra 10

Brown (2005:438) introduced his article ‘The Problem of Mixed Marriages in Ezra 9-10’ by posing a question as to what motivated Ezra to declare the dismissal of intermarriages; “Was it political, racial, religious, sociological, or a combination of some or all of them?” I would assume that Brown asked this question with a high regard to the fact that God’s interaction with humankind is through all real systems which make real life work, and as mentioned previously, if we want to understand this interaction, we need to consider these systems. However, before we come to this point, it would be quite important to give brief attention to the receiving community of Ezra-Nehemiah’s writings.

The best place to start this brief note would be to consider Camp’s statement which says, “Patrilinealism is one aspect of the larger kinship system that became definitive in the Second Temple period for those who returned from exile. It received special emphasis from the priestly group who took the trouble to construct the biblical genealogies and who adopted male circumcision, a symbol of patrilineal descent, as the sign of the covenant” (2011:308). In this statement we find two major characteristics of the receiving community of Ezra-Nehemiah’s text. First, this community was patrilineal and, according to Camp, it meant to deny completely the existence of women, as she pointed out, “patrilineal Israel is a family of men” (2011:309). However, in a real sense, this does not mean women did not exist. They did exist and played a great role in both individual families and society in general. Scholars such as Gale A. Yee, W. R. Dörmes and many others have maintained that there is no time in the history of ancient Israel that women lost their role in the society⁴³. In agreement with Yee and Dörmes, Eskenazi (1992:27) is another scholar who concluded, “Like them, I argue that

⁴³ In normal circumstances, different from the individualistic and industrial societies, in group and agrarian based societies, women play a great role in providing for health and religious needs of all the members of their families. Gale A. Yee describes the pre-state of Israel as primarily family based and agrarian oriented society and “Women held crucial positions in food production and preparations as well as in the general supervision of the family household” (2003:32). This is in support to what Dörmes pointed out decades ago when she wrote, “According to the earlier tales, women play a significant role in the accounts, particularly during the time of the judges” (1986:59).

much more can be said about the roles and powers of ancient Jewish women than has been acknowledged hitherto.” This is where a question arises: if the women played a great role in the well-being of the people in the ancient Israelite society, why are they absent in the Hebrew Bible texts? To put it simply, “Where are the women?” Eskenazi (1992:25). This takes us to the second characteristic of the receiving community of Ezra-Nehemiah’s text.

One of the possible answers to this question can be the second major characteristic of the receiving community of Ezra-Nehemiah’s writings, which we find in the second part of Camp’s statement – “the priestly group who took the trouble to construct the biblical genealogies”. In this case, the priestly group might be responsible for the absence of women in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible. In other words, not all men in ancient Israel took part in the collection, compilation and/or redaction of the ancient texts. In her article ‘The Contribution of Archaeology to the Study of Women in Biblical Times: Two Case Studies’, Jennie R. Ebeling highlighted the fact that when historians and Biblical scholars attempt to reconstruct the history of ancient Israelite women based only on the Hebrew Bible as the main source, they encounter serious challenges. “Among them is the fact that much of the biblical text is an androcentric work of the male urban elite of the southern kingdom of Judah, whose concerns centered on male-dominated public life” (2009:384). From here one can understand that by ‘male elite of the southern kingdom of Judah’, Ebeling refers to those who were in charge of the temple, mainly the priests and Levites. In other words, the Hebrew Bible in general and Ezra-Nehemiah’s writings in particular were composed and/or edited by male elite, and the main audience was a patrilineal society of ancient Israel.

However, one more important aspect in this topic is that modern feminist biblical scholars have argued that despite the unpleasant portrayal of women in the biblical narratives, one can still identify a female voice in those texts and, therefore, in one way or the other women have participated in the process of compilation and/or edition of the Hebrew Bible. This argument is based on the fact that at least two genres of the Hebrew Bible, namely celebration (singing and dancing) and mourning (crying and lamenting), are typically attributed to women. In her article “My Soul is like the Weaned Child that is with me: The Psalms and the Feminine Voice” (2001), Lisa W. Davison started by identifying women in the Hebrew Bible such as Hagar in Genesis 21, Rebekah in Genesis 25, Hannah in 1 Samuel 1 and Esther in Esther 14. According to Davison, these women are said to have spoken/prayed directly to God, and God is said to have answered their prayer without any intermediary. Davison moved on to identify

another group of women in the Hebrew Bible who are portrayed as having compiled hymns and sung them with the community. These women are Miriam in Exodus 15, and Deborah in Judges 4, to mention only two. After a very sound analysis of these prayers and hymns, Davison concluded, “If these matriarchs had their prayers recorded, then surely some of their sisters also composed hymns and laments, which were included in the community’s prayer collection” (2001:158). One example will be sufficient to sustain this point. Based on the socio-historical context of Psalm 137, Davison suggests that this Psalm might have been composed during the exilic period (587 – 539 BC) and, because it opens in v. 1 with the people being by the waters of Babylon weeping /lamenting, then v. 8 addresses the daughters of Babylon, it is plausible to attribute it to a female voice; perhaps it was narrated by the daughters of Jerusalem. This way of reading it makes more sense, given the fact that in the Hebrew Bible women are portrayed as “skilled” (Jer. 9:17-22), as far as singing, dancing and mourning were concerned. It is on this basis that Davison asked the following rhetorical question “Why should one not consider these songs to have been used by the ‘mourning women?’” (2001:160).

In short, as we move on to analyze some possible factors that might have contributed to the abolition of intermarriages in Ezra 10, we should bear in mind that most of the Hebrew texts as well as Ezra-Nehemiah’s writings were compiled by an urban elite group together with the ‘skilled women’. Their intended audience was predominantly a patrilineal society. Moreover, “It is clear that the goal of the biblical writers was not to write a ‘handbook’ to life in ancient Israel, and, as a result, women’s issues and concerns – and the concerns of the majority of non-elite men living in ancient Israel – are mentioned in only minor and tangential ways” (Ebeling, 2009:384-85).

5.5.1. Socio–Economic

In the previous section (5.4.2), we looked at Eskenazi’s article ‘Out from the Shadows: Biblical Women in the Postexilic Era’. In this article Eskenazi sought to understand marital status and the role of the Jewish women in Elephantine, during the Second Temple period. In this regard, we have indicated above that Eskenazi has brought to our attention at least two cases of intermarriage of a Jewish woman and an Egyptian man, and a Jewish free man, who was also identified as an officer in the temple of Yahu, and an Egyptian slave. We have also noted that these marriages were not only interethnic, but they were also contracted; they had

written contracts.⁴⁴ More importantly, according to Eskenazi, these contracts were more of a Mesopotamian custom than of an Egyptian. We have also indicated that another aspect of great importance in Eskenazi's discoveries in those two archives concerns the economic status of those two women – Mibtahiah and Tapmut. They were both eligible to inherit properties from their parents and also have an equal share of the properties they acquired with their husbands during their marriage time, in case of divorce or death of their spouse.

Now the point which Eskenazi and other biblical scholars are bringing to the table is that if these Mesopotamian laws, which granted property ownership to women, were applicable in the Jewish community in Elephantine, would it not be reasonable to suggest that they were also applicable in Palestine? Aware and very much concerned about this question, Farisani (2003:48) commented, “A sociological analysis of these marriages shows that these marriages were not illegal in terms of both the Persian and the Israelite laws...” If that was the case, the intermarriage crisis in Palestine could also be approached from a socio-economic point of view. First, the foreign⁴⁵ wives were in a potential position, according to the Mesopotamian law, to have equal share of the properties they acquired with their husband during their marriage. Second, if Mibtahiah and Tapmut had inherited properties from their fathers, then it would mean that the children of those foreign women were also eligible to inherit properties from their fathers. It is on these bases that Eskenazi (1992:48) concluded, “The fear of mixed marriages with their concomitant loss of property to the community makes most sense when women *and children* can, in fact inherit *property*” [italics added].

Moreover, we have indicated in the previous section that with the emerging of *חֵתֵן*, *נִשְׂאָה*, and *הַשִּׁיב* types of marriage in the Second Temple period, the *נָתַן* – *לְקַח* basic type of marriage which had the advantage of keeping the property within the kinship circle, tended to die off. Now, through intermarriage, the family properties were exposed and available to families that are not related.⁴⁶ In other words, the land could be inherited by foreigners. Consequently, the wives and children of immediate kinship would be victims of losing their rights to the family property, especially the land. In short, when intermarriage crisis in the Second Temple

⁴⁴ For Tamut and Ananiah's marriage contract, see Eskenazi (1992:30).

⁴⁵ It has been maintained in this study that the term foreign does not necessarily mean in terms of geographical origin; it may mean those who did not go the exile but remained in the land throughout the exilic period.

⁴⁶ Douglas (2002:12) has observed that the mothers would not let their marriage property go to someone else. They would persuade their husbands to appoint one of their own children to inherit the property.

community is approached from the socio-economic perspective, one of the conclusions can be the one Curcio (2010:175) has correctly stated, “The most threatening aspect of the mixed marriages is that the offspring would stand to inherit land that had been owned by Jewish families for centuries.”⁴⁷

5.5.2. Political

Biblical scholars who approached this topic from a political stand point have pointed out at least two aspects, which are regarded to have influenced the abolition of intermarriages in the postexilic Judean community. One is known as political pressure.⁴⁸ One of the aims and responsibilities of the Persian Empire was to make sure that its borders were well structured and equipped with local and loyal officials. Berquist describes the strategy of the Persian rulers as follows, “Fortifications, high allowances for local spending, and greater authority exercised by local administrators all depict a coordinated attempt to maintain the loyalty and safety of this border community.” In other words, Persian authorities found themselves at risk of losing power and control to their opponents – Egyptians and Greeks, and one way to reverse the situation was to remove all the foreigners from their governing positions and promote locals.

As if it was not enough, they also promoted local languages, religions, and cultures. One can now understand why Nehemiah complained that half of the children born of those intermarriages did not know how to speak the language of Judah (13:23-25). In this case, all those who did not know how to speak the local language should be sent away from the community. With emphasis on the local religion, the religious leaders, who also assumed political responsibilities, made sure that the Law of God, which also seemed to play a role as a national constitution, was carefully and strictly obeyed. In fact, Balentine (1996:138-40) argued that the codification of the Law and the construction of the temple were directly

⁴⁷ See also Esler (2003:429).

⁴⁸ Berquist (1995:108-109) argues that during the reign of Artaxerxes I Judah was in a very difficult situation. At that time there were three political powers, namely Persia, Egypt and Greece in dispute. It was in this situation that the Persian ruler Artaxerxes I appointed governors he trusted, in this case Nehemiah and Ezra, and he positioned them in the province of Judah. It is in this context that the Chronicler empowers both Nehemiah and Ezra with political authority over the previous governors, and at their arrival in Jerusalem they labeled those foreigner governors such as Sanballat and Tobiah (Nehemiah 2:10), and the governors of Trans-Euphrates Bishlam, Mithredath and Tabeel (Ezra 3:7) as enemies of the returnees.

linked to Persian political policy.⁴⁹ Now, when the elders came together to propose the final decision about the issue of intermarriage in Ezra 10:3c, they stated, “Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law (וכתורה יעשה).”

Politically, there should be a punishment for those who would fail to follow the orders, “Anyone who fails to appear within three days would forfeit all his property, in accordance with the decision of the officials and elders, and would himself be expelled from the assembly of the exiles” (Ezra 10:8). Moreover, scholars have argued that another political strategy of the Persian authorities was to maintain the lineage of the ruling class as ethnically pure as possible. In this case, the two major institutions – political and religious, were merged into one and were given to the priests to manage. It was no longer the responsibility of the emperor to appoint the governor. Instead, the governor had to come from the priestly lineage. That is why, on the one hand, the disqualification of priests with intermarriage status or connection in Nehemiah 13 was necessary and urgent, and on the other hand, abolition of intermarriage not only among the priests but the entire golah community was the only means to achieve this aim.⁵⁰

5.5.3. Religious

This topic has been significantly addressed above.⁵¹ However, for the sake of this chapter’s content, we will insert a brief summary which will touch upon general aspects of the subject. First, it has been indicated that those divorced wives were not foreigners in a sense that they were originally from nations other than Palestine.⁵² According to our literary analysis above, these women were foreigners due to their religious practices. Since Yahweh had become the

⁴⁹ According to Balentine (1996:148-40), it was within the Persian political policy to give each of its colony freedom to codify its cultural and religious laws as long as they did not compromise the Persian lordship. This was a powerful means that the Persians used to maintain control over their colonies as well as to guarantee loyalty from them.

⁵⁰ For a brief discussion, see Wolak (2012: 97). Still in relation to this point, Berquist (1995:117) observed that “alliances made through marriage would allow foreigners to have special access to the Yehud’s own center of power, possibly undermining the work of Yehud to be a partially autonomous colony under Persia’s rule.”

⁵¹ See chapters 2.4.3, 4, 5 and 4.2.2, 3.

⁵² This does not mean that there were no women among those Samaritans, Edomites and others who migrated to Yehud during those migratory movements. It is, therefore, highly possible that among those divorced women, some were literally foreigners or had this type of background.

national deity, all the people in His kingdom were supposed to be completely under his legislation and worship Him alone. Instead, those divorced women behaved differently; they were accused of idolatrous practices, which implied that they were citizens of other gods' kingdoms. Consequently, they had to be divorced and sent away from Yahweh's kingdom to their respective gods.

Second, it has been repeatedly mentioned in the previous chapters that the Babylonian experience, as far as Ezra-Nehemiah's writings are concerned, was conceived as an outcome of religious misconduct of the people of Israel, particularly with the issue of intermarriage. After that bitter experience in exile, the religious perspective had changed significantly in two major aspects. One, the juridical authority had moved from the earthly kings to Yahweh and His temple. Consequently, purity was one of the highest core values not only for the high priests, but also for the entire nation. Two, now it is not a matter of individual or family immorality or apostasy; it is about national and collective priesthood. In this case, whatever contaminable object found in the holy nation and the kingdom of priests, it should be avoided and eliminated immediately. Otherwise, it is what Goswell (2011:198) said about Ezra's prayer in 9:7. "In this prayer, the time phrases, 'to this day' (v.7a) and 'as at this day' (v.7b), express the perspective that the Israelites were still (in some sense) in exile, namely, they were still, like their fathers, suffering for their (persistent) sins by being under the yoke of foreign sovereigns."⁵³ In other words, though the Israelites had been back to their own land, they were still under God's punishment. Why? "Because of our sins..." (v.7b). That is where divorce and the sending away of all foreign women became the best solution. Moreover, Sebastian Grätz (2011:196) has pointed out another religious reason for this crisis – the reading of the Torah. He argued that if the reading of the Torah by Ezra contributed to the intermarriage crisis in Palestine during the Second Temple period, "It seems ... that the Judean community in Upper Egypt was not aware of the same restriction of intermarriage attested in the biblical tradition."

⁵³ In fact, in his comment about the political stability of the Persian period, Hays (2008:76) stated, "Persia did not allow Judah to return to its prior state of independence." In other words, the mere fact that Cyrus had commanded that the Israelites should go back to their home country did not mean they were free from oppression. The only difference is that at this time they endured the oppression in their own land.

Lastly, it would be beneficial to briefly point out the Persian religious policy. It is highlighted earlier in this writing that the Persian Empire in general and the rulers in particular had a high regard for Zoroastrianism and Ahura Mazda. According to this religion, one of the abhorrent conditions of a person was to cohabit with someone from a different ethnic group.⁵⁴ Becking (2011:62) commented that in Athens, for example, no offspring from intermarriage would be registered as a member of the community or be granted citizenship⁵⁵. This might have influenced the religious understanding of the postexilic community to some extent and the measures taken thereafter in this regard. In short, the returnees wanted to make sure that the religious principles are being practiced, as Washington (2003:429) pointed out, “The biblical text points to a religious concern to preserve distinctive Judean practices.”

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to approach the crisis of intermarriage in the Second Temple Jewish community from a socio-historical perspective and came to the following conclusions: First, with regards to the myth of the empty land, both pre- and postexilic traditions present a double-sided understanding. On the one hand, it was portrayed as an empty land in the sense that those who lived in it were invisible because of their state of impurity, they were lifeless just like the bad figs, as indicated in Jeremiah 24 and the absence of the people meant that the land was on its Sabbatical rest (Leviticus 26:34-35). On the other hand, the land was fully inhabited. Both canonical text⁵⁶ and archaeological finds indicate that there have been always people in the land. This leads us to the second conclusion – the Babylonian deportation was not total. Despite the people who were left in the land to work the vineyards, there were migratory movements in and out the land of Yehud, due to political stability and the policy of the dominant powers of the day. They intentionally displaced their subjects from their comfort zones to foreign nations. This then justifies the presence of the foreigners in the land who later intermarried with the returnees. The third conclusion we have drawn is that the reason why the intermarriages took place was not only because of the presence of those categorized as foreigners in the land, but the basic cultural type of marriage *נתן – לקה* had

⁵⁴ Becking (2011:62).

⁵⁵ Foerster (1964:131) argued that similar to the situation in Athens, in the Second Temple Jewish community “Only pure-bred Israelites could occupy posts of honor, and belong to the Sanhedrin, or be of those who were heads of the community or custodians of alms.”

⁵⁶ The term canonical text here implies the recognized biblical text by the Christian Church.

been replaced with *התן*, *נשא*, and *השיב* types, as the returnees were looking for all means to get integrated into the community with full right to possess the land. These types of marriage had two major implications. One was religious tolerance and the other was freedom to marry outside one's kinship. These two implications significantly changed the socio-economic perspective of Ezra's recipients in the Second Temple community. The land was exposed to non-genuine children. Politically, the imperial authority put pressure on the locals to take over the administration of the Yehud province. In doing so, they would be loyal to the Persians and be against other regional powers, such as Egypt and Greece; and religiously, Washington (2003:429) pointed out, "To preserve distinctive Judean practices." Washington raises a very important point here, which needs further investigation. If one of the major reasons for the abolition of intermarriage was 'to preserve distinctive Judean practices' – those practices which distinguished the Jewish from the non-Jewish community – the question arises as to what would be the implications of these distinctive practices to the ethnic identity of the Jewish community. We turn to this question in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Ezra 10 and Identity Formation

6.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter we have analyzed the socio-historical context of Ezra 10 and have observed that there were different factors that contributed significantly to the intermarriage crisis in the Second Temple Judean community – factors such as political, socio-economic, and religious. Of the highest importance is that these socio-historical circumstances contributed not only to the abolition of intermarriages as described in Ezra 10 and Nehemiah 13, but they also shaped the Second Temple Judean community into a new self.¹ In other words, the community's identity before the exile changed significantly due to these factors. For example, before the exile, the community defined itself through the Davidic dynasty, but now it is through the Persian Empire.² In the pre-exilic period the king occupied the central place in every aspect of the community's life, but now it is the temple and the Torah.³ Before the exile, religion was a matter of apostasy, but now it is all about both individual and community purity. Moreover, the issue of intermarriage had never been as serious as it came to be in the postexilic period, as Wolak (2012:95) said it correctly, "Under Ezra and Nehemiah, there was now a much stricter rule against intermarriage that went well beyond earlier intermarriage prohibitions with specific groups mentioned in the Torah." All these and other changes lead us back to the question we left in the previous chapter, the question about ethnic identity. What are the implications of such changes and such zeal for 'Judean distinctive practices' in the formation of the community's identity? Put simply, "What defined a Jew"⁴ in the Second Temple period? Before we address this question, we shall first consider some key terms such as ethnicity and ethnic boundaries.

¹ Balentine (1996:130) argues that those factors had given the Judean community a new shape, as he stated, "In sum, whatever life community in Yehud built for itself, it had to be viable in relation to Persia's imperial control."

² Balentine (1996:130).

³ Balentine (1996:130).

⁴ This is a straight forward question posed by Hamilton (1995:102) in his literary comparative work between Jews in Elephantine and those in Palestine.

6.1.1. Ethnicity

Scholars of the subject have addressed this topic from two different schools of thought – primordialism and constructivism.⁵ On the one hand, primordialists define ethnicity as a state into which members of the group are born and, therefore, are not responsible for what they are. To justify the approach, these scholars have moved further to outline the six Hutchinson and Smith's features which are said to ethnically identify and tie together members of a given group: a) A common proper name; b) a myth of a common ancestry; c) shared historical memories; d) one more element of common culture which can be religion, custom, or language; e) a link with a home land; and f) a sense of solidarity.⁶ On the other hand, constructivist scholars understand ethnicity not as a natural, fixed and immutable state of a given individual or community, but rather it is “more malleable, affected by the passage of time and change of historical and cultural circumstances”⁷ (Pitkanen, 2004:167). In other words, scholars such as Cordell and Wolff (2010:15) would say, “Both individual and collective identities are seen as fluid; individuals are said to be able to choose them more or less at will and to instrumentalize them opportunistically for themselves, as well as manipulate the identities of others because they either feel a heightened need for cultural identification or seek to pursue specific political mobilization agendas.” To illustrate this approach, in his comparison between the Jewish community in Elephantine and the one in Palestine, Hamilton (1995:116) observed that though the two communities spoke the same language (Aramaic) and were under the same political circumstances during the Persian period, they were ethnically different from each other. Then he concluded, “This study has confirmed that the notion of ethnic identity is not a fixed datum, but rather a complex series of interlocking characteristics.” This means that the two Judean communities seem to have different identities not only because of their different geographical locations, but they also had different agendas according to their contemporary socio-historical circumstances. This is the approach which will be considered in this study, but now we shall first look at the next term – ethnic boundaries.

⁵ These two schools of thought were taken from Cordell, Karl and Wolff, Stefan (2010:14). However, Pitkanen (2004:167), while agreeing the existence of the two schools, noted, “The approaches of scholars are often neither purely primordial nor instrumental, but rather it is a matter of emphasis.”

⁶ For more details see Pitkanen (2004:166-7), Esler (2003:414) and Cordell and Wolff (2010:15).

⁷ Hamilton (1995:102) classified the flexibility of ethnicity into two categories: time and place. According to him, “Ethnicity varies from time to time and from place to place.”

6.1.2. Ethnic Boundaries

Having defined ethnicity as ‘a term for collective cultural identity’⁸ and ‘more malleable, affected by the passage of time and change of historical and cultural circumstances,’⁹ we now move on to consider the definition of ethnic boundaries. According to Esler (2003:413), ethnic boundaries are “processes, which permit some forms of interaction but forbid others.” The interaction is for the members of the community, while the prohibition is for the outsiders. In agreement with Esler and other modern scholars on the fact that ethnicity is malleable, Wallman (1979:5) argued that ethnic boundaries are indeed a process. They are not left behind by the changes of historical and cultural circumstances; instead, they move together with them. She stated, “The boundaries of ‘us’ shift, the criteria which mark them change, and even the utility of having or maintaining a boundary at all is not consistent.” In this case, neither an ethnic boundary emerges at one point of time, nor does it remain unchangeable forever. This is what Wallman (1979:6) means by reactivation. Being a social and dynamic organism, “It is a culture in-adaptation-to, in-response-to, up-against ‘others’ within a context shared by both sides of the ethnic boundary, and it is shaped by the aims, constraints and opportunities of that context as they pertain to each side.” Put simply, in the process of formation of a boundary and its respective changes, both ‘we’ and ‘others’ (the insiders and outsiders) are called to respond and adapt themselves to certain situations, which can be from within or without. Moreover, Wallman (1979:6-7) has pointed out another important aspect about this topic – the meaning of an ethnic boundary. According to her, a boundary is not only a two sided identity negotiator, but it also has two meanings. The first one is what she calls the objective meaning; the boundary which is obvious and visible even to the outsiders. As we will notice below, the Temple of Jerusalem, Nehemiah’s walls, and language will be typical examples of this kind of meaning. The second meaning is “subjective to the extent that it inheres in the experience of participants.” This will be the case of the Sabbath, Passover, and other subjective ideas and traditions of the Torah. Their meaning is exclusively experienced by the members of the group. To sum it up, De Vos (1975:16) wrote, “In brief, the ethnic identity of a group of people consists of their subjective symbolic or emblematic use of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from

⁸ Spencer (2006:45) is another scholar who identifies himself with the constructivist school of thought.

⁹ See Pitkanen (2004:167) for more details.

other groups.” If this is the case, then we shall go back to our main question and survey some of those objective and subjective symbols which were unique to the Jewish community in the Second Temple Period.

6.2. Identity Formation and Ezra’s Recipients in the Second Temple Community

It has been repeatedly pointed out in the course of this writing that the exilic experience meant primarily a loss of Israelites’ identity. Politically, the Israelites were no longer an independent monarchy, but a Babylonian and later Persian colony. Economically, their land, the only resource for their survival, was taken away while they were in exile, and one of the means of having it back was through intermarriages, as suggested by contextual scholars. Both the loss of the land and the phenomenon of intermarriage had many implications within the kinship system, such as the turning of many into day laborers as well as the giving of oneself or one’s children into slavery as a means of survival. Religion was another competitive aspect of the day. Without thinking about the role played by the tribal or national deities in the Ancient Middle East Mediterranean context, we can simply consider the competition between Samaritans and Israelites over the ownership of Yahweh and the Temple. While the former claimed to be the true Yahwists and Gerizim the place Yahweh had chosen for Himself (Becking, 2011:110), the latter insisted that Jerusalem was the city of Yahweh, and the golah were the elected ones (Ezra 1:2-4). Moreover, still with regard to political and religious competitions, Blenkinsopp (1998:29) stated, “If Mizpah took over from Jerusalem the role of Judah’s administrative center, in effect the capital of the province under Babylonian rule, it is not implausible to suggest that a sanctuary of however modest dimensions in or near the town would have been part of the provincial government’s complex of building – this especially if Mizpah was initially a royal residence”. Blenkinsopp brings us to an understanding that there was also a question as to where the provincial capital together with the sanctuary should be and who should be in charge. In short, there was an issue of political, socio-economic and religious power control. It is in response to all these and other internal and external socio-historical circumstances that the process of negotiation for the identity formation of the Second Temple Judean community has to be approached, as it will be shown in the next paragraphs.

6.2.1. The Temple

In chapter two of this writing it is mentioned that one of the predominant themes in the first part of Ezra's writing (chapters 1-6) is the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. The major reason Cyrus "relocated the Jews"¹⁰ from Babylonia to the Persian province of Yehud was to reconstruct the temple in Jerusalem. Though the use of temple was not a new concept in the Middle Eastern context,¹¹ the Jerusalem Temple had a significant role for the identity formation of the Judean community mainly for two reasons. First, we have mentioned in chapter one of this study that the mere fact that the second temple was rebuilt right on the foundations of the first one – the Temple of Solomon¹², and not elsewhere, gives a clear indication that one of the main purposes was to maintain continuity between the two communities – the pre- and the postexilic communities. This is again to concede the fact that at this point the contemporary community is not interacting with a new concept altogether; instead, it is a re-formulation of what already existed in the past. Second, the center of the new community's life had shifted from the Davidic dynasty to the temple. This implied that the community is no longer identified with King David but with the Temple in Jerusalem.¹³

¹⁰ Wolak (2012:96) understands the returning of the exiles to their home land as a part of the Ancient Middle East political policy of relocating ethnic groups from their native zones to foreign places.

¹¹ Ancient Middle East kings and emperors had always mixed politics with religion to the point that temple and palace were part and parcel for the ruling class. Mostly this is because some of the rulers understood their ascending to power as a divine gift. A clear example can be found in the Cyrus' cylinder where Cyrus stated explicitly that it was the Lord, the God of heaven, who had given him all the kingdoms of the earth and had therefore appointed him to build a temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2). Moreover, the pre-exilic tradition, especially during the dynastic period, gives an understanding that it was the deity who chose a king to rule over his people and, therefore, it was the responsibility of the chosen king to build a temple for the deity. Another example can be found in Egypt. According to Hamilton (1995:107) it seems like there was strong competition between the Egyptian temples and the Yahu temple in Elephantine. He argued that the destruction of the Elephantine temple by Vidrang, the Persian commander, followed the destruction of the Egyptian temples by Cambyses was due to this competition. Balentine (1996:140) is another scholar who argues the building of temple was part of the Persian Empire's political policy. He commented, "It was also Persian policy to support the construction and maintenance of regional cultic sites. Throughout the Persian Empire, in Babylon, Egypt, Asia Minor, and in Yehud, local cults were restored and patronized by successive Persian emperors."

¹² This study acknowledges the fact that some scholars deny the existence of the first temple. However, we agree with Esler (2003:417) when he said, "The belief that it (the temple) had stood in Jerusalem and had been destroyed by the Babylonians is central to the narrative in Ezra-Nehemiah" which represent one of the main sources we learn about the re-invention of this new community. Ben Zvi (2003:32) is another scholar who argues that the Second Temple is indeed an element of continuity between the two communities, as he stated, "Nor should one ignore that YHWH – however understood – was worshiped in the Judahite and Yehud temples, or that the new community – along with its temple – identified itself in terms that stressed continuity with a Judahite past."

¹³ Lasor, Hubbard, and Bush (2003:264) have argued that the temple is indeed one of the key boundaries of the Israelite's identity, as they stated, "A second theme underscores the temple and Torah as the twin based of postexilic Israel's identity."

Their identity in the Davidic dynasty had failed them, because most of David's successors, such as Solomon in 1 Kings 11 and other kings who came after him – Ahaziah in 1 Kings 22:51-52; and Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri and Ahab in 1 Kings 15-16 had led them to sin. Consequently, God had withdrawn Himself from His people, allowing foreign nations to take control over their lives. The presence of the Second Temple, according to Lasor, Hubbard and Bush (2003:264) is therefore a new experience for the people of Israel; it “symbolizes the renewed presence of Israel's God among his people.” This renewed presence of God through the temple had at least three implications, as far as the identity of the Jewish community was concerned¹⁴. First, from the time the temple was dedicated (presumably 515 B.C.) onwards, Israel as a distinct community became known as the people of the Second Temple. In other words, the Jerusalem's Second Temple became one of the areas of negotiation for Israelites' ethnic identity.¹⁵ In fact, even the present study uses this ‘Second Temple community’ terminology to distinguish the two groups – the pre- and postexilic communities. A clear evidence of this negotiation is the prohibition of those in the land who wanted to help in the reconstruction of the temple. “You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the Lord, the God of Israel...” (Ezra 4:3b). Second, together with the dedication of the temple, the Passover festival was instituted (Ezra 6:19-22), and it became another symbol of Jewishness. In his comment about the so-called the ‘Passover letter’ by an Elephantine Jew called Hananiah, Hamilton (1995:109) stated, “Keeping the feast was apparently felt to be a mark of proper Jewish behavior.” The third implication is that the Israelites identified themselves with Yahweh who was present among his people through the temple. Yahweh was no longer in Mizpah, Gilgal, Bethel or any other high place in Samaria as claimed by others; Yahweh was in Jerusalem, and He was the essence of the Israelites' identity.

Now the question is what did all these have to do with intermarriage? It has been repeatedly mentioned in this writing that the intended audience in the Second Temple community

¹⁴ Balentine (1996:135) also agrees with others on the point that the temple was indeed one of the core elements which identified Israelites. He wrote, “Whereas the Writings begin with the Psalms and the profile of a life defined by the ideals of piety, they conclude with the Chronicles and a description of a people whose corporate identity is centred institutionally in the temple.”

¹⁵ With regards to the importance of the Temple in Jerusalem for the Judean community, Breneman (1993:53) pointed out, “The temple was vital to the Jewish community, for it was a symbol of God's presence and a reminder that they were to be ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (Exodus 19:6). See also Becking (2011:36).

interpreted the exilic experience as a direct outcome of Solomon's intermarriage (Nehemiah 13:26-27). God had withdrawn himself from his people because Solomon had been unfaithful to Him through the תּוֹרַת type of marriage, which implied above all religious tolerance, as discussed in chapter 5 above. Now having God's presence among his people through the temple being renewed, whatever had caused His previous withdrawal had to, by all means, be avoided. In this case, the people of Israel had to separate themselves from all the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices. This is to agree with Wallman (1979:6) when she said, "Any particular line or confrontation may sometimes be useful to the business in hand; ... It may be a resource for 'us' and a liability for 'them'". In this case, the temple became a great achievement for the priestly community – the Second Temple community, but an inconvenience for the rest of the polytheistic people – in this case, the foreign wives.

6.2.2. Yahwism

Yahweh had fulfilled the word He had spoken long ago through the prophet Jeremiah. "Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back from captivity" (29:12-14a). Through political circumstances, Yahweh raised a deliverer – Cyrus, to free His people from the exile.¹⁶ In 539/8 B.C. the first group of the returnees went back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and re-establish the worship of Yahweh, which included the giving of free will offering, sacrifices, and prayers. In fact according to Darius' decree in Ezra 6, this was the major purpose for the reconstruction of the temple, "Let the temple be rebuilt as a place to present sacrifices...Whatever is needed – young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem – must be given them daily without fail, so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the kings and his sons" (vv.3b, 9-10). As the Israelites worshiped Yahweh in his temple through sacrifices and prayers, Yahweh did not only hear them, but the Israelites also had the privilege of expressing their belonging to Him, as it is stated in Exodus 19:5, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all

¹⁶ It is very important to note here, once again, that scholars have commonly held that this freedom was not exclusively for those from Yehud province; instead, it was a general strategy of the Persian political policy. Hayes (2007:14) stated, "Cyrus held a policy of allowing deportees from regions conquered by the Babylonians to return to their native lands."

nations you will be my treasured possession”. Although the Israelites were still under the dominion of the Persian authority, they imagined themselves as not belonging to the Persians any more. From the time they returned to Jerusalem and found themselves in the presence of Yahweh, the Israelites became Yahweh’s personal treasured possession and, in return, Yahwists became their new common name and identity. When comparing the Jewish community in Elephantine with the one in Yehud, Hamilton (1995:110) illustrated this point, as he stated. “Yahwism was a given for the group, and membership in the group was linked to worship of Yahweh.” In the middle of many different ethnic groups – Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans and other minority groups, the Jews in Elephantine separated themselves as distinct group through worship of Yahu /Yahweh¹⁷ and, therefore, they were known as Yahwists. The same might have been the case in Judah. The returnees separated themselves from those in the land, gathered together around the temple and encouraged one another to exclusively worship Yahweh. In this case, the Yahwists were called to stay away from the idol worshipers – an action and behavior which motivated them to dismiss all intermarriages.¹⁸

6.2.3. Torah

Another area of negotiation for identity formation identified by both the canonic text and biblical scholars is the Law of Moses, known as the Torah. The condition given in Exodus 19:5 is very significant for and appealing to the community to quickly engage in this type of negotiation. The only way the people of Israel would be an exclusive treasured possession of Yahweh was by full obedience to the commandments of Yahweh and to His covenant. In other words, the protasis in this statement is the obedience to Yahweh’s commands, while its apodosis is the being Yahweh’s possession. Having realized that the pre-exilic community had deliberately neglected this very important condition and its respective promise for their survival as a people, Ezra and his group had to come all the way from Babylon to Judah and teach the people to obey the statutes which Yahweh had commanded them. This was Ezra’s main mission to Jerusalem. “You are sent by the king and his seven advisers to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God, which is in your hand.” In fulfillment of his mission, Ezra read the Law, in Nehemiah 8, and after that the people’s

¹⁷ See more about the relationship between Yahu and Yahweh in 5.4.2 of this writing.

¹⁸ For more details, see 3.4 of this writing.

perspectives changed.¹⁹ “Those of Israel descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers” (Nehemiah 9:2). According to Balentine (1996:132-3), the Second Temple Judean community exhibited “Torah piety, a piety defined by obedience to and trust in the torah of the Lord.” Scholars such as Lasor, Hubbard and Bush (2003:254) have argued that it was the ‘Torah piety’ that shaped the behavior of the Second Temple Judean community and qualified the postexilic to be the people of God²⁰ - the Yahwists. As a community of ‘Torah piety’, Neusner (1989:ix) argues that the Torah should be viewed as a two-sided document – written and oral, and “The system as a whole forms a way of life – everyday actions, social existence – and a world view explaining that way of life and linking it to God’s will for ‘Israel’.”²¹ God’s will is that the people of Israel keep God’s statutes and therefore be His exclusive possession (Exodus 19:5-6). In other words, it was not a matter of knowing, but of utmost importance, the people were called to apply the teaching of the Torah to their everyday life. If the Torah commanded, “Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land”, it was the responsibility of every Israelite to obey the command practically by canceling whatever kind of treaty one had with the peoples of the land, including the marital ones.

Moreover, Esler (2003:425) has brought another very important point with regard to the Torah of God in the negotiation for identity formation of the Second Temple community. He commented that just like the wall which Nehemiah had built around the City of Jerusalem, though breakable, the law represented the unbreakable wall which ethnically closed in all the members of the Second Temple Judean community, as he put it in the following terms, “For with the physical boundaries of the walls secure, it is appropriate to remind the group of the symbolical boundary which maintains its identity – the Mosaic law, which would later be

¹⁹ The term change here does not mean in a radical and instantaneous sense. We maintain the scholarly understanding that the formation of these areas of identity has to be perceived as process. It might have taken a long time for Ezra to teach the Law, the people to understand it and finally separate themselves from their foreign wives.

²⁰ Lasor, Hubbard and Bush (2003:254) concluded, “In sum, the law defined postexilic Judah’s understanding of what behavior God required for them truly to be the people of God.”

²¹ In line with Neusner (1986:ix), Becking (2003:31) concluded, “The concept of תורה in the Book of Ezra has nothing to do with a rigid law-religion. תורה in the Book of Ezra is to be seen as a viable symbol for the adequate life in relation to YHWH: it is an expression of a religion that is presented as the basis for a community in search of an identity.”

described as the ‘impregnable palisades and wall of iron’ that Moses fenced about the people.” Having mentioned the wall of iron that Moses fenced around the community, we now move to Nehemiah’s wall.

6.2.4. Nehemiah’s Wall

Parallel to Ezra’s mission to Jerusalem is that of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was among those exiles who had decided to remain in Babylonia when others returned to their home land in 539/8 B.C. Nehemiah’s plan to go back to Jerusalem came apparently later when he received the news that those who had returned home were in great trouble and disgrace, for the wall of Jerusalem had been broken down and its gates burnt up (Nehemiah 1:3). After a very serious time of prayer, Nehemiah was given permission by King Artaxerxes to go up to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall and restore its gates. From the canonical point of view, this became Nehemiah’s major mission to Jerusalem – to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. However, scholars such as Esler (2003:422) have approached Nehemiah’s mission from a socio-historical perspective and argued that the cause of Nehemiah’s distress when he received the news and his motivation to go to Jerusalem was not simply because of the walls which had fallen down; instead, it was an issue about group identity. When the king asked him why his face looked sad, and yet he was not sick, Nehemiah’s answer was, “Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire (v.3)?” The issue here was not about walls and gates; it was about an ancestral place which was a ruin and the remnant that went back had remained unprotected for almost a century. According to Esler (2003:422), those who survived the exile and went back to Jerusalem might have been physically unprotected from those around them and therefore vulnerable to external attacks. For example, the opposition to the rebuilding the temple and the prohibition of those who wanted to help (Ezra 4) give us a hint about this phenomenon.

Furthermore, in Nehemiah 4 we get the impression that there were many opponents who used this to take advantage of any development that was to take place in Jerusalem. Of course, on the one hand, the returnees might have been a threat to the political and economic powers of the people of the land. On the other hand, they might have been unhappy and very

disappointed when they found out that their land had been taken away.²² So it is highly possible that there was indeed a tension between the two groups. Moreover, the mingling of the holy seed with the peoples around them (Ezra 9:2) occurred possibly because the going in and out of the city, both the golah and the peoples of the land, was uncontrolled. This hypothesis is based on Nehemiah's reaction toward the gates of the city. When Nehemiah realized that although the walls were already up the people continued to come in and out the city for business even on the Sabbath, he quickly fixed the gates and gave orders that they remain closed to avoid such uncontrolled movements. By doing so, it was possible to keep the returnees physically separate from the rest of the peoples of the land. Esler (2003:422) commented, "In the process of keeping one ethnic group separate from others there must inevitably be some barriers to intercourse." In this case, the walls of Nehemiah were a typical barrier to permit interaction only among the members of the group and yet a prohibition of the outsiders – "prescription and proscription"²³ respectively. The closing of the gates had brought one more important area of negotiation for the community's ethnic identity – the observance of the Sabbath.

6.2.5. Sabbath

Another important area of negotiation which motivated Nehemiah to quickly fix the gates and keep them closed is the observance of the Sabbath. Nehemiah 8 starts with the reading of the Torah by Ezra, followed by the confession of the entire golah (chapter 9). The outcome of the confession was a written document containing a common agreement of what the people would do and would not do. Among the things the Israelites promised not to do was their involvement in the business with the peoples of the land, on the Sabbath or any holy day, as it reads, "When the neighboring people brings merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day" (10:31). However, Nehemiah was surprised when he discovered that his compatriots did not keep their promise; instead, they continued to buy grain, wine, grapes, figs and other products from the people of the land (13:15-22) on the Sabbath. In response to this situation, as mentioned previously, Nehemiah quickly fixed the gates and ordered them to be shut on the Sabbaths. In this case, the walls

²² For more details, see 5.4.1 above.

²³ Technical terms employed by Esler (2003:425).

did not only close in the members of the group, but they also ‘enforced’²⁴ the observance of one of the most important commandment – “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant; not your animals nor the alien within your gates” (Exodus 20:8-10). Like the Passover and other festivals, the Sabbath is one of the most important elements which draws the uniqueness of the Jewish community. As to its origin, the canonical text points to the creation story in Genesis 2:2, “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing, so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creation that he had done.” However, scholars such as Becking (2011:121) do not go along with this hypothesis and argue that the origin of Sabbath is still unknown,²⁵ though in Judaism, its “observance is an important identity marker until this day”²⁶ (2011:118).

6.2.6. Genealogy

Genealogy is another area of negotiation for ethnic identity found in Ezra-Nehemiah’s writings. We have previously referred to the answer given by Zerubbabel and Jeshua in Ezra 4:5, “You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the Lord, the God of Israel...” It is obvious that in this statement the ‘you’ refers to ‘the other’ – those labeled as enemies of Judah and Benjamin, while the ‘we’ indicates ‘the self’ – Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the rest of the returnees. However, one of the questions a reader of this verse may ask is as to how Zerubbabel and his group were able to identify those of ‘you’ from the ones of ‘we’. This is where the list in Ezra 2 plays a great role in the process of negotiating the boundary between the two groups. Unlike those who argue that the list was for political and economic purposes, Esler (2003:419) suggested a different reason. Based on Ezra 2:59-62, Esler argued that if the list was for political and economic control, there would

²⁴ A term used by Wolak (2012:94).

²⁵ For more details on this topic – the origin of Sabbath in relation to Genesis 2:2, see Becking (2011:121-3).

²⁶ One of the conflicting elements between Jesus and the Pharisees in the 1st century C.E. was the observance of the Sabbath. For example, in both John 5:8-15 and 9:13-34 Jesus got into trouble, because he performed a healing miracle on the Sabbath; in Matthew 12:1-8 Jesus’ disciples were accused of doing what is not permitted by the Law when they picked heads of grains on the Sabbath to eat. The reason for such a strong piety on Sabbath observance, which provoked a strong opposition against Jesus and his disciples is stated here by Rothenbusch (2011:61), “The Sabbath is a ritual ‘Identity maker’ that articulates the membership of the ethnic group and allows them to experience it.”

be no point of excluding others who failed to prove their kinship connection with the pre-exilic ‘father’s house’. Why were those priests who could not find their family records excluded from priesthood and declared unclean (v.62)? One of the possible answers to this question might be that the genealogical list served as a symbol of those who were members of the “we” ethnic group, as addressed in chapters 1.2 and 2.3.1. Still with regards to genealogy, Wolak (2012:96-97) brings up a very important question – who determined Jewishness in Ezra 9-10? Is it the father or the mother? Wolak’s argument is based on the fact that while the language used in both pre- and postexilic literature and traditions seems to be purely patriarchal, the decision taken by Ezra – to send away all the foreign wives and those children born of their marriage with Jewish husbands, represents a shift from patriarchal to matriarchal lineage. In other words, those children born of the Jewish husbands were denied their right to Jewishness simply because their mothers were not Jews, “despite their Judean fathers’ membership in the tribe.”²⁷

6.2.7. Language

As indicated above in chapter 5.5.1, contextual scholars have approached Ezra 9-10 from a socio-economic point of view and argued that the foreign women were sent away together with their children because of the fear that these children would inherit the properties, especially the land of their fathers. However, other scholars such as Hamilton (1995:114) have suggested that language also seemed to be an important matter in this process of the Israelites negotiating their identity. In Nehemiah 13:23-27, for example, a reader gets the impression that one of the highest concerns of Nehemiah with regard to the intermarriages was that half of the children born of those marriages did not know the language of Judah – the language of their fathers; they only spoke Ashdod, supposedly the language of their mothers. If Hamilton is correct when he observed that Aramaic was one of the major languages spoken in Palestine during the Persian period²⁸, one can propose that the “language

²⁷ This writing will assume that when Wolak brought up the issue of change from the patrilineal to matrilineal kinship, he was fully aware of the priestly approach in Ezra-Nehemiah’s literature, as Hamilton (1995:113) acknowledged it and stated, “The redactor never asks what happened to the divorced wives and their children... His concern is with the purity of the community and the maintenance of its boundaries.” In other words, the main goal of the redactor at this point was not patriarchalism. Instead, it was purity. The seed of Abraham should not be mingled with a foreign seed. Even at the later stage when conversion to Judaism was possible, it was possible that the children born of Jewish women married to converted gentiles to Judaism would not qualify for the priestly position.

²⁸ Hamilton (1995:114).

of Judah” referred to by Nehemiah might have been Aramaic. If this was the case, then Nehemiah might have been worried as to how those children would be able to understand the teaching of the Torah and be able to obey them. In fact, it is reported in Nehemiah 8 that while Ezra read the Torah, the Levites instructed the people, “making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read” (v.8). Does it mean that the Torah which Ezra read was written in different language other than the one the Levites used to make its meaning clear to the rest of the people? This seems to be the point which Hamilton (1995:114) is attempting to illustrate when he argues that while Aramaic functioned as the common language for daily communication, Hebrew was the language of religious literature even in the postexilic period and, therefore, its use “allowed one to assert one’s Jewishness simply by speaking.” If this argument has considerable weight, then one could, once again, tentatively propose that the children in Nehemiah 13:23-24 spoke neither Aramaic nor Hebrew. Consequently, they were far from asserting their Jewishness. Southwood (2011:9) seems to support this argument when she pointed out that “Language and ethnicity are tightly interconnected, especially in the eyes of ethnic communities themselves.” In this case, a language is more than a means of communication. Whether a sign or verbal, language is more than a group of words, phrases, or sentences; it expresses the meaning of what a given ethnic group is all about. Southwood (2011:8) insisted that the preliminary function of a language “is to evoke the whole”. Language expresses and, when it is in a written form, maintains the community’s worldview. However, Southwood (2011:1) admits that language can also serve as a tool for group assimilation. This might be the case when Nehemiah maintained that all non-speakers of the local language should be sent away; there might be a fear of assimilation. The foreign women seem to be capable of assimilating their children (the new generation) into their respective ethnic identities.

6.2.8. Judaism

Lastly, the area of identity negotiation which will be addressed here is Judaism, and we will start this discussion with the following quotation: “The term *Judaism* refers to an evolving *religious* tradition most, but not all, of the adherents of which are *ethnically* Jewish” (Hayes, 2011:ix). One thing we will notice in this quotation is that Judaism stands for two aspects. First, it stands for an ethnic identification. Second, it refers to a religious tradition. Starting with the former, Grabbe (2004:168) noted that “The term ‘Jew/Judaeen’ was, first of all a designation for inhabitants of Judah. Yehudi (plural Yehudim) was the term used to refer to

those who were seen as natives of Judah.” Yehud being a name of a place – “the name of the Persian province of Judah”, the natives of that province were called Judeans. No matter where one resided, as long as he/she was originally from within the judicial borders of the Yehud province, he/she would be identified as a Yehudi. This might have been the case with the Yehudim who had been deported to Babylonia, those taken to Elephantine for military purposes, or the ones who had migrated outside the province. Grabbe (2004:168) summarizes, “Thus, membership of the Jewish community or people was primarily a matter of birth. If you were born into the people, whether in Judah or in one of the communities elsewhere in the ancient Near East, you were a Jew/Judaeen.”

Several decades later, supposedly with the influence of the returnees from the exile, Yehud changed from being a political colony to a religious center. Hayes (2011:1) is one of the scholars who concede this hypothesis when she stated, “Known as Jews in the centuries following the exile, they carried with them the sacred literature (the Hebrew Bible), ideas, and traditions that laid the foundation for the three major religions of the Western world: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.” From the time the returnees settled in the land onwards, the requirements for the membership into the Judean community seemed to shift from birth and place of origin to the observance of those ideas and tradition recorded in the sacred literature (the Hebrew Bible). In other words, there was no way one could claim his/her membership to Judaism merely by birth or place of origin without a proof that that particular person or community was a faithful practitioner of the teachings found in the holy book. This is the point brought up by the instrumentalist school of thought – ethnicity is dynamic; it is affected by the passage of time and the change of historical and cultural circumstances.

Now the question we might ask here is what were those ideas and traditions which were recorded in the ancient literature (the Hebrew Bible)? From the correspondences between the Jewish communities outside and that in Palestine, we can suggest that the ideas and traditions are some of those areas of negotiation for identity formation we have discussed previously – the temple, Yahwism, Passover, Sabbath, to mention only four. Some correspondences from the Jewish community in Elephantine to the community in Palestine are typical examples to illustrate this point. In his analysis of an independent archive owned by Jedaniah, a Jewish leader in Elephantine, Gerstenberger (2011:127) pointed out, “The letters he collected were especially those with communal importance; they deal with questions about the temple of Yahweh in Elephantine, determining the correct Passover date, and the like.” Becking

(2011:124) displayed another anonymous letter which talks about deliverance of goods on the Sabbath day. Although scholars have found it difficult to come to a concrete conclusion due to the high level of the letter's damages, Becking (2011:124) is of the opinion that "The inscriptions from Elephantine evidence the existence of the Sabbath institution among the Yehudites." In short, in the beginning, to be a Jew meant a place of birth or origin; one had to be originally from the Persian province of Yehud. Later it became an element which ethnically identified all the faithful ones to the teaching of the Torah – known as Judaism.

Before we move on to the conclusion of this topic, it is important to insert here a brief note about the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, mainly for two reasons. The first one is with regards to the Hebrew Bible which laid the foundation for both Judaism and Christianity, as indicated above. The second reason is that in our concluding question below – the theological and socio-ethical implications of Ezra 10 for the Christian church, this note is relevant. Hayes (2011:1) argues that, both Judaism and Christianity have their foundations in the ideas and traditions of the Torah (the Hebrew Bible). However, from the fact that the two religions did not emerge simultaneously, it is obvious that one had its origin before the other. In this regard, Judaism emerged first, and about five centuries later (in the first century A.D.) Christianity was born.²⁹ In considering this fact, Poirier (2008:536) concluded that, "Judaism's claim to the Bible is comparatively greater. But, it should also be said that Christianity has more continuity³⁰ with the Hebrew Bible... In point of fact, rabbinic Judaism and Second Testament Christianity can each claim the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament as its authority for the philosophical structure of its faith." Clifford (2008:15-16) is another biblical scholar who sides with Hayes and Poirier in this regard. In his article titled 'The Original Testament: A Catholic approach to the Hebrew Bible', Clifford, addressed the question as to 'How does the Old Testament fit in the Christian Bible' and proposed that the question should be stated the other way round: "How does the New Testament fit in the Christian Bible?" Then he asserted, "The short answer is that the Old Testament reaches its climax there (though it continues beyond)." It is likely, however, that by 'Christian Bible', Clifford

²⁹ The term born is implied here in the context of Johnson's (1999:1) usage. The Christian church is an outcome of "a living expression of living experience" of the first century C.E. Palestinian men and women who felt the presence of the resurrected Lord and the transforming power in their individual and collective lives.

³⁰ With regards to the continuity between the ancient Scriptures and the Christian traditions, Johnson (1999:7) suggests that it should be approached from the historical point of view, not as a model but a method, "because of the nature of the Christian community that claims the continuity with the people of the past."

did not mean that the Old Testament was composed by and for the Christian community; instead, according to him, “Adopting this apocalyptic framework [the imminent arrival of God’s kingdom portrayed in the writings of Daniel and the community at Qumran] Jesus preached the kingdom of God, and New Testament writers understood Jesus as the culmination of the history in the ancient Scriptures.”³¹

Moreover, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has addressed this topic correctly when it stated that, “The revelation of this One God is given to us first of all through the Hebrew scriptures. They are the Bible of the Jews as they were the Bible of Jesus and his followers as well as that of the first generation of Christians” (Brockway, Buren, Rendtorff and Schoon, 1988:148). In short, the nature of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity is primarily based on the Torah – the ideas and traditions of the Hebrew Bible. This is where the essence of both Judaism and Christianity is grounded, though the latter being a ‘reshaping of the symbols’ of the former.

6.3. Conclusion

In this chapter we have sought to analyze the implications of the abolition of intermarriages in Ezra 10 to the identity formation of the Second Temple Judean community by asking the question as to what it meant to be a Jew in the postexilic period. In this search, we noted that when the Israelites lost their pre-exilic identity – the Davidic dynasty and its components, they had two options. One was to give up and be assimilated into other ethnic groups of the day and the other option was to respond to those socio-historical circumstances and through them to engage in a process of negotiation for their identity formation, which would separate them from the peoples around them. The Israelites chose the latter option and Judaism – a practical expression of all the ideas and traditions of the Hebrew Bible, became their final identity. Having reached this point, two questions remain. One, which kind of identity is Judaism? If both Hayes’ definition of the term Judaism as a “religious tradition” (2011:ix), and Albertz and Becking’s³² conviction about the role of religion in the identity formation of

³¹ Johnson (1999:16) argues that the New Testament writings are a “reshaping of the symbols of Judaism in light of the experience of a crucified and raised Messiah.”

³² With regards to the kind of identity Judaism is, Albertz and Becking (2003:xiii) affirmed, “In organizing the seminar at Utrecht, we were convinced that religion played an important role in the emergence and the final identity of the Yahwistic community in Yehud.”

Ezra's intended recipients in the Second Temple community are accepted, then this study will tentatively propose that though there might be other kinds of identity in the postexilic context, as addressed in chapters 2 and 5 of this study, religious identity stands as the primary. Consequently, the dismissal of the intermarriages in Ezra 10 was one of the means taken by Ezra's intended audience to reinstitute a monotheistic, spiritual and ethical identity known as Judaism – the backbone of Christianity. This brings us to the second question. What are the theological truths that the Christian church can learn from Ezra 10 and apply in this globalized society without compromising her true identity and mission? This will be the leading question as we turn to our conclusions in the next paragraphs.

CONCLUSIONS

As we come to the conclusions of this writing, we will start by reiterating our hypothesis that the abolition of intermarriages in Ezra 10 was one of the means taken by the Second Temple Judean Community to reinstitute a monotheistic, spiritual and ethical religion which later came to be known as Judaism. To demonstrate this hypothesis, the present writing has addressed the issue of the abolition of intermarriages in Ezra 10 and its implication to identity formation of the Second Temple Judean community from an integrated approach and came to the following conclusions: First, according to the pre-exilic traditions, monotheism was to be taken as the primary source of Israel's identity. The Israelites were to avoid any kind of idolatrous assimilation or influence from the peoples of the nations by not intermarrying with them. However, some of the kings who supposedly represented Yahweh among His people deliberately ignored this essential aspect of the people's identity and decided to marry foreign women, who introduced idolatry in the land. As a result, Yahweh was not the only God among His own people in the Promised Land; instead, He was one among many gods. Because of that, He punished the people of Israel by letting them to be taken by foreign nations to exile – a historical incident which marked the end of the pre-exilic Israelites' identity as a distinct people in the Ancient Middle East.

When the exilic period was over, and the returnees went back to Yehud, their highest aim was to negotiate their identity, based particularly on the areas of the Temple and Torah. On the one hand, the Torah reminded them of their original relationship with Yahweh. It was through the reading of the Torah that the returnees came to understand that they were originally called to be Yahweh's exclusive treasured possession; a holy nation and a kingdom of priests and, therefore, they were to be worshipers of Yahweh only. On the other hand, the Temple represented the renewed presence of Yahweh among His people. From then on, Yahweh alone, not human kings or any other gods, was to occupy the throne and rule over His nation – the people of Israel. In this case, everybody and everything in the holy nation that behaved contrary to these two key areas of identity negotiation – the Torah and the Temple, was to be immediately removed from the community. In other words, in that particular socio-historical context, Ezra's intended readers had the obligation – a priestly holiness obligation, to separate themselves from “the neighboring people with their detestable practices...” (Ezra 9:1).

Second, with regards to textual-literary analysis, this writing has given special attention to some key terms, such as foreign women, holy seed, and divorce, to highlight only three. From the Hebrew Biblical perspective, the term 'foreign' had different semantic functions. It could mean an Israelite living in an area where he/she did not belong; it could mean one who left his/her home country and went to stay in a foreign land, or a traveler who needed an overnight accommodation; it could also refer to a stranger or foreigner who would be potentially dangerous to both cultic and social lives of Israel. Out of these three functions, this study discovered that Ezra used more frequently the third meaning to refer to those divorced women. That means those women were not necessarily foreigners in the sense of being from a different ethnic group or geographical nation, but as potentially dangerous to both cultic and social lives of the *golah*. These women were worshipers of other gods, and they easily influenced both their husbands and children to adapt to their pagan religion. It is from this understanding of the foreignness of those divorced wives that the term holy seed can be approached. Without ignoring the possibility that this term might have the connotation of racial or biological identity, this study concluded that from the fact that there was a strong zeal from the *golah* community to maintain a pure religious identity – a community made up of members who worshiped Yahweh alone, the term 'holy seed' has to be also addressed from a religious point of view. In that case, the divorce of the foreign women, whether a historical or etiological account, was a means of negotiating for a pure and monotheistic group identity. However, when the topic of intermarriages and divorce is considered from the broad scope of the Hebrew Biblical literature, the approach has to accommodate both diachronic and synchronic perspectives. In other words, each has to be treated in its own socio-historical context and also in relation to other cases.

Third, contextual studies have proposed that there were other factors such as political and socio-economic ones which might have equally contributed to the sending away of the foreign women and their children. When the deportees returned to their homeland after many decades in exile, their land had been taken away either by those who had escaped the deportation or by the ones who had migrated in during political instabilities of the day. One of the practical ways of having their land back or at least an access to use it was through intermarriages – a phenomenon which had not only religious implications, but also socio-economic disadvantages. From the Mesopotamian context, both wives and children had legal rights to inherit properties from their husbands or parents. That implied that the land still

remained in the possession of the foreign wives and their offspring. Politically, the contemporary powers had supported ethnic grouping and leadership to maintain control over their subjects. These two pressures – the socio-economic and political, plus the zeal for religious purity played an important role for the abolition of intermarriages in Ezra 10.

Last, this study has sought to analyze the implications of the abolition of intermarriages in Ezra 10 to the identity formation of the Second Temple Judean community by asking the question as to what it meant to be a Jew in the postexilic period. One important aspect which has drawn our attention to this topic is that identity formation of any group of people is determined by the socio-historical circumstances around them. It is in response to such circumstances that an identity formation takes or loses its shape. For example, it was in response to their contemporary socio-historical circumstances that the pre-exilic Israelites lost their identity. Almost a century later, the postexilic Israelites responded to their own circumstances and shaped their identity. They approached their negotiation basically through the ideas and traditions of the Hebrew Bible, with emphasis on priestly holiness expressed through Torah piety and all the components of Yahweh worship in His Temple, such as Passover and other festivals, Sabbath, genealogy, language, to mention only a few. In other words, in the whole process of identity negotiation, Ezra's audience in the Second Temple community had one primary goal – holiness unto Yahweh. This came to be known as Judaism, the strong backbone of Christianity.

Although this was not the focus of our study, a few concluding remarks about the implications of the above conclusions for the Christian church today should be made. One cannot deny that the issue of intermarriage, and particularly the criticism of it, is also a very contentious matter in many Christian churches on the African continent.³³ Often, the biblical texts on intermarriage, including Ezra 10, are used in these contexts to legitimize church practices which deal strictly with intercultural or intertribal marriages. The texts are often applied very directly, as if they were in the first place written for the church communities of the 21st century. One should, however, take into account that there is a huge socio-historical distance between the world for which Ezra 10 was intended, and the world of the Christian church today. This statement warns against interpretation strategies that would ignore the

³³ See, for example, the studies of Nupanga Weanzana (2006) and Bedru Hussein (2002).

cultural and historical environments in which the Ezra 10 text was produced. We have indicated that the theological motivations and issues of identity formation during the Persian period have to be taken into account in the interpretation of Ezra 10. This does, however, not mean that this text does not offer any message for the church today. The study has highlighted that God works through practical human conditions in any era, to reveal his will to his people. This observation emphasizes that one cannot ignore the cultural and historical contexts within which the issue of intermarriage is discussed. Our study emphasized that Ezra 10 had the intention in its first context of reception of encouraging the restored community in the postexilic Persian period to dedicate themselves and their community to the Lord's service, and to understand themselves as still being the people of God (despite the experience of exile). Ezra 10 therefore offers advice on a theological level – the restored community of Ezra's time had to understand themselves in theological terms. Such an understanding does not allow that the practices that are reflected in that text, namely the abolishment of intermarriage, be copied in a socio-historical context (such as the 21st century) that is so much different. The task of Christian churches in their interpretation of this text should rather be to (i) be sensitive to the theological message of text, and (ii) to be sensitive to the socio-historical difference between the intended audience of the text and today's context. These guidelines will hopefully contribute to more responsible interpretations of the text in African Christian churches.

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