

Ezra 6:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat,

Analysis

And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat, This verse describes Passover celebration after temple completion, emphasizing two groups: returning exiles and proselytes who 'separated themselves... from the filthiness of the heathen.' The Hebrew nivdelu (נִבְדְּלוּ) means 'separated' or 'set apart,' indicating decisive break with pagan practices. The phrase 'filthiness of the heathen' (tum'at goyei ha'aretz) refers to idolatry and immoral practices characterizing Canaanite religion.

The inclusion of converts alongside ethnic Israelites demonstrates that covenant identity based on faith and obedience, not merely ethnicity. Those who genuinely sought the LORD were welcomed, prefiguring the gospel's inclusion of Gentiles. Yet the requirement of separation from pagan defilement shows that inclusion demanded transformation—converts couldn't maintain syncretistic practices but must completely embrace Yahweh worship.

Theologically, this models New Testament teaching about separation from worldliness (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1) while welcoming all who genuinely seek God. The church must maintain holy distinctiveness from cultural paganism while

embracing all who come to Christ, regardless of background. Ethnic boundaries don't define God's people, but spiritual boundaries do.

Historical Context

The post-exilic community faced complex identity questions. Who belonged to Israel? The exile had scattered Jews throughout the empire and brought foreigners into the land. Some locals claimed Israelite heritage while practicing syncretistic religion (Samaritans). Others were pure Gentiles interested in Jewish faith. The community had to define boundaries without ethnic exclusivism or religious compromise.

Passover celebration after temple completion (515 BC) marked crucial renewal moment. The first Passover in the restored temple connected post-exilic Judaism to the exodus and pre-exilic traditions, establishing continuity despite catastrophic disruption. This connected the struggling returnees to their redemptive heritage, reminding them of God's past faithfulness.

The mention of separating from 'filthiness' reflects the serious problem of syncretism. Many inhabitants of the land practiced mixed religion, combining Yahweh worship with pagan elements (2 Kings 17:24-41). The returnees insisted on exclusive Yahweh worship, refusing compromise. This theological rigor created social tension but preserved covenant faithfulness.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the inclusion of proselytes prefigure the gospel's breaking down of ethnic barriers?
2. What does required separation from 'filthiness of the heathen' teach about conversion's radical nature?
3. How should churches balance welcoming seekers with maintaining holy distinctiveness from worldly culture?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאכַל ו	בְּנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל:	הַשָּׁבִים	מִהַגּוֹל ה		
did eat	And the children	of Israel	which were come again	out of captivity		
H398	H1121	H3478	H7725	H1473		
וְכָל ל	הַנִּבְדָּ ל	מִטְמֵא ת				
H3605	and all such as had separated	themselves unto them from the filthiness				
	H914	H2932				
גוֹי	הָאָרֶץ	אֵלֶּה ׀	לְדַרֵּשׁ ה	לִיהוָה י	אֱלֹהֵי י	יִשְׂרָאֵל:
of the heathen	of the land	H413	to seek	the LORD	God	of Israel
H1471	H776		H1875	H3068	H430	H3478

Additional Cross-References

Ezra 9:11 (Parallel theme): Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness.

Isaiah 52:11 (References Lord): Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD.

2 Corinthians 7:1 (References God): Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Nehemiah 9:2 (References Israel): And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.

Ezra 9:1 (References Israel): Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

Psalms 93:5 (References Lord): Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever.

Nehemiah 10:28 (References God): And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding;

2 Corinthians 6:17 (References Lord): Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

Ezekiel 36:25 (Parallel theme): Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.