

Insider Trading
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Ezra 10:8

(BHS)	(HCSB)
וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָבֹא לְשִׁלְשֶׁת הַיָּמִים	1 Whoever did not come within three days
כְּעֵצַת הַשָּׂרִים וְהַזְקֵנִים	2 would forfeit all his possessions,
יִתְּרָם כָּל-רְכוּשׁוֹ	3 according to the decision of the leaders and elders,
וְהוּא יִבְדָּל מִקְהַל הַגּוֹלָה:	4 herem
	5 and would be excluded from the assembly of the exiles.

Line 1 is pretty simple to read, “All who not come-in by three days.” Line 3’s “decision” is also “counsel;” “As the counsel of the princes and elders.” Line 2 obviously relates to line 4. Anyone who does not show up at the meeting “forfeits” his stuff. But Holeman has this footnote at the end of line 2, “Lit *would set apart all his possessions for destruction.*” Take a look at that verb. All of his property would be *herem*. And he would be banned from the community of faith. This folds into a great biblical theme.

“Biblical theology” is the study of great themes in the Bible, even if those themes are not taught clearly in theology books or have been defended against heretics. By way of example I could list 1) the theology of God’s Presence, 2) the Divine Warrior, 3) the Land, and 4) the Kingdom. I teach a whole course that explores these and many more.* And one big one, that is present in every book from Genesis to Revelation, is the theme of Community. Arguably, the worst curse that can befall a person is exclusion from the community of faith.

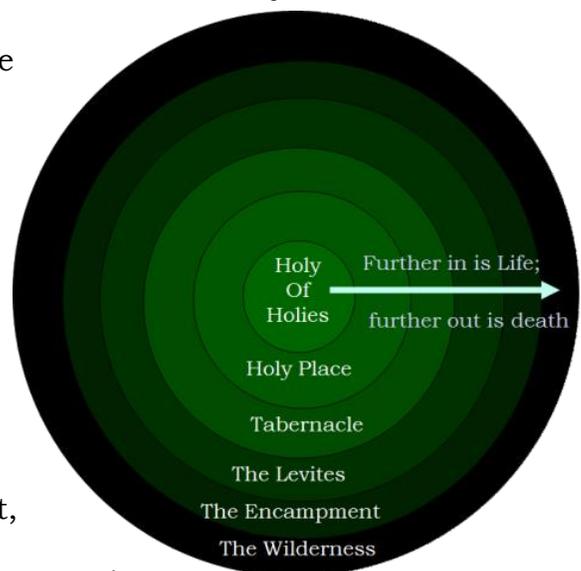
Every New Testament book has in it somewhere a discussion of those who are real Christians, and those who are fake. This is one of the commonalities that bind together the whole NT. And in our verse, this concept is connected with a declaration of *herem*.

[See](#) my previous discussion of the meaning of *herem*. There, I explain how to pronounce it, and I argue that the English word that best conveys its range of meaning is “condemn.” Here, in Ezra, is an especially revealing use of the word. I discussed this in the previous essay, but it deserves more attention. Because here, the meaning of *herem* has to do with *belonging*, with *community*, with whether you are “in” or “out.”

The people of Israel had offended God to such a degree that they were removed from the Promised Land altogether. Then, miraculously, and according to prophecy, they were given one last chance. So they called a great revival meeting. Attendance was mandatory. Only those attending were numbered with the faithful. If someone couldn't be bothered, or cared so little that they blew it off, then they were not considered to be part of what was being built by the Jewish leadership. They were excluded, and their belongings were rendered *herem*. Everything they had belonged to God, so if they themselves were not part of that community, they lost the right to hold those possessions.

If you look at how the camp of Israel was organized in the wilderness, you will see a structure to it. It looked like this:

The closer you got to the center, the holier it was. And the further out that you got, the commoner it was. To be within the camp was to be spiritually safe. You were under God's protection. You were in the zone that was blessed. God's Spirit dwelt there. And you knew that you were where you were supposed to be.



But outside of the camp was chaos and death. It was the haunt of demons and those who served them (Lev 16:10). This is the meaning of the description of the encampment in the book of Numbers.

The same spiritual truth applies to the church today. Within the church is life and love, the true presence of God and the proclamation of the truth. Jesus lives with his people. But outside the church are nothing but half-truths, unrestrained idolatry, aggressive confidence in lies, and upside-down values.

Outside the church, people are lost. They really are. Paul describes excluding someone from the church community as delivering his body to Satan. Outside the church, Satan is more than willing to take a recalcitrant sinner and harden him in his bondage to sin. Satan will try to convince such a one that he is in the right, and the church's discipline is misguided. But Paul hopes that the man who suffers this antifellowship will come to repentance and be saved (1 Cor 5:5).

So, where are your values? Are you a fully engaged Christian through participation in the life of the community? Or are you out on your own, disconnected and alienated? A Christian is fully alive only when functioning as part of the body.

Something to think about at General Assembly.

* Such as Covenant, Holiness, God as Lord, God's Election of Israel, The One True God, Wisdom, David, God's Voice, the Divine Name, idolatry, the Sabbath, the Cult, etc.