

27.02 Ezra's Leadership (Ezra 8:35, 36; 9:1–15; 10:1–44)

✓ “*Check*” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows.

[. . .] Brackets indicate a remark to the teacher that will not be read aloud; they also show answers to questions.

Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional needed materials. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.

Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach: Vocabulary words are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print on colorful cardstock and cut apart.

- *priests*: men from the tribe of Levi (descendants of Aaron) who offered sacrifices for the people
- *Levites*: men from the tribe of Levi who ministered in the Temple but were not necessarily priests
- *abomination*: something absolutely disgusting or detestable and worthy of extreme hatred or rejection. God calls false gods *abominations*.
- *guilt*: being wrong. Some people do not admit they are guilty even though they are wrong.
- *iniquity*: the sin of doing one's own will instead of God's
- *pagan*: a description of people who do not worship the one true God
- *covenant*: a promise or agreement

Scripture: (ESV)

8:35 At that time those who had come from captivity, the returned exiles, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and as a sin offering twelve male goats. All this was a burnt offering to the Lord. 36 They also delivered the king's commissions to the king's satraps and to the governors of the province Beyond the River, and they aided the people and the house of God.

9:1 After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, “The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. 2 For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost.” 3 As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled. 4 Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice. 5 And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God, 6 saying:

“O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. 7 From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt. And for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and to utter shame, as it is today. 8 But now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant and to give us a secure hold within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery. 9 For we are slaves. Yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem.

10 “And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, 11 which you commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, ‘The land that you are entering, to take possession of it, is a land impure with the impurity of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations that have

filled it from end to end with their uncleanness. 12 Therefore do not give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters for your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.' 13 And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, seeing that you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserved and have given us such a remnant as this, 14 shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations? Would you not be angry with us until you consumed us, so that there should be no remnant, nor any to escape? 15 O Lord, the God of Israel, you are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is today. Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this."

10:1 While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children, gathered to him out of Israel, for the people wept bitterly. 2 And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, addressed Ezra: "We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. 3 Therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the Law. 4 Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it." 5 Then Ezra arose and made the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take an oath that they would do as had been said. So they took the oath.

6 Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib, where he spent the night, neither eating bread nor drinking water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles. 7 And a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, 8 and that if anyone did not come within three days, by order of the officials and the elders all his property should be forfeited, and he himself banned from the congregation of the exiles.

9 Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month. And all the people sat in the open square before the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of the heavy rain. 10 And Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have broken faith and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel. 11 Now then make confession to the Lord, the God of your fathers and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives." 12 Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, "It is so; we must do as you have said. 13 But the people are many, and it is a time of heavy rain; we cannot stand in the open. Nor is this a task for one day or for two, for we have greatly transgressed in this matter. 14 Let our officials stand for the whole assembly. Let all in our cities who have taken foreign wives come at appointed times, and with them the elders and judges of every city, until the fierce wrath of our God over this matter is turned away from us."

. . . 16 Then the returned exiles did so. Ezra the priest selected men, heads of fathers' houses, according to their fathers' houses, each of them designated by name. On the first day of the tenth month they sat down to examine the matter; 17 and by the first day of the first month they had come to the end of all the men who had married foreign women.

18 Now there were found some of the sons of the priests who had married foreign women: [specific people are named]. 19 They pledged themselves to put away their wives, and their guilt offering was a ram of the flock for their guilt. [Fourteen more specific names] . . .

23 Of the Levites: [Six men]. 24 Of the singers: Eliashib. Of the gatekeepers: [Three men.]

25 And of Israel: [many names] . . . 44 All these had married foreign women, and some of the women had even borne children.

Introduction/Review:

Why had the people of Israel been taken into exile by King Nebuchadnezzar? [Because they had turned from the one true God to worship other gods.] Why had Israel turned to other gods at all? Several factors caused them to turn from God. Here are some:

(1) Their sinful nature within wanted its own way instead of doing God's will.

(2) They became curious about other gods. God had said not to be curious about or even mention the false gods of the nations around them. False worship can often be very tempting or interesting. Perhaps people were intrigued by the beauty of an idol. Curiosity eventually led to worship. God was right when he commanded not to be interested in other gods, which are not gods at all.

(3) They married people who served other gods. God had also commanded the people not to marry people of nations around them because He knew the spouses would turn Israelite hearts away from the most-high God to false gods. King Solomon had a real problem with this commandment: at first, he wholly followed the Lord, but eventually he served other gods because his wives turned his heart to them.

False worship resulted in God's sending Israel into exile in Assyria and Babylon. A very serious commandment is "Do not marry unbelievers."

Seventy years after the beginning of their exile, God had caused King Cyrus to allow the Jews to go back to Jerusalem (in 538 B.C.). Many returned to their homeland. Zerubbabel led them to rebuild the Temple.

Now, after about another eighty years (in 458 B.C.), Artaxerxes decreed again that Jews could go back home. Ezra the priest was to check things out in Jerusalem. He was to teach the people the ways of God and to appoint leaders to make sure the people obeyed God and the king. Ezra and ✓at least 4000 people then returned to Jerusalem from Babylon.

Story:

Bad news

✓One morning after Ezra had gotten settled in Jerusalem, some princes came to him, saying, "The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites ✓who have lived and died here for the last seventy years have not separated themselves from the people of the land. They have married Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites."

Let's stop here just a moment. [Teacher, refer to the chart of the nations at the end of this lesson. Fold the chart at the center line and show the side, "People Whom the Jews Married."] Let's look at the list of these nations. Read them with me: "Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites."

God's warning

Now, way back in Deuteronomy 7:1–3, God had warned Israel not to marry certain nations. Look at this list. [Teacher, show the side, "People God Said Not to Marry."] Read the names of these nations with me: "Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites. Do you notice anything similar about these two lists? Let's draw lines between the names that are the same. [Do so.] Only four names have no match. Notice that the Jews married into the very nations God had commanded them not to marry when He had originally given the law. What do you think was likely to happen to those who married worshipers of false gods? [They would worship false gods, and God would punish them as He did in the captivity.]

The princes who came to Ezra with the news of intermarriages said the people, the priests, and the Levites had all done this abomination. In fact, they said the princes and rulers had been the worst in this sin!

Ezra's grief

What distressing news this was to Ezra! What did Bible people often do when they were distressed? [Tore their clothes; wore sackcloth.] Ezra didn't wear sackcloth, but he tore his clothing—both his inner and outer garments. He did something else in his great grief that we haven't heard about before: he pulled out some of the hair on his head and from his beard. Then he sat down by the Temple and stayed there, wondering, grieving, and weeping until the evening sacrifice ✓probably around 2:30 to 3:30 in the afternoon.

As Ezra sat there, other God-fearing men gathered to join Ezra in his sorrow. At the time of the evening

sacrifice, Ezra changed his position, falling on his knees, bowing his head, and spreading out his hands to the Lord. In great heaviness of soul he prayed:

Ezra's prayer

[Teacher, this is a long but great prayer. If you desire to shorten this section, these are the main points:

1. Ezra's shame at the long history of sin in Israel.
2. God's punishment of that sin in sending to captivity.
3. God's grace in bringing a remnant back to Jerusalem.
4. The Jews' return to the very sin that caused their captivity.
5. God's right to punish severely.

The complete prayer follows in the next three paragraphs.]

"O my God, I am too ashamed to lift up my face to You, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been very guilty. Because of our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation. Yet, the LORD our God has shown grace—letting a few of us escape and come back to His holy place so that our God may teach us and give us new life. We were slaves; yet our God did not leave us in our bondage, but He gave mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to let us live again, to rebuild the ruins of the house of our God.

"And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, which You commanded long ago, saying, 'The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their impurity. Now therefore, do not marry their sons nor their daughters.'

"Even though You punished us for our evil deeds, that punishment is less than our iniquities deserve. Now here we are again—breaking Your commandments and marrying people committing these abominations? It seems as if You would be angry enough with us to consume us, leaving no survivor? O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous. Here we are before You in our guilt. How can I stand before You with this great guilt?"

Shecaniah's words

Now, remember. Ezra was known to the people of Jerusalem as the most important leader sent from King Artaxerxes. In addition, he was a priest and a scribe/teacher. This man's tearing his clothes, pulling out his hair, weeping, and praying drew the attention of the people. By the time he had finished praying, a large congregation of men, women, and children had gathered around him. They, too, agreeing with Ezra's concern, cried and wept exceedingly.

One of the men, whose name was Shecaniah, approached Ezra and said, "We have sinned against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land. However, there is hope in Israel in spite of this. Therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to divorce all these wives and those who have been born to them, Let it be done according to the law. Arise, Ezra, for this matter is your responsibility. We are with you in this. Have courage, and do it."

Ezra's action

Shecaniah's words stirred Ezra to action. He got off his knees and said to the chief priests, the Levites, and all the people, "Swear to me—promise me—that you will do this—that you will put away all these heathen wives."

"We swear," answered all the people.

"Then, let you and all the other Jews in Judah and Jerusalem come here to Jerusalem within three days. If anyone does not come, we will take away his property and his citizenship as a Jew."

Many Jews felt just as sad as Ezra about this situation. They surely planned to get to that meeting. ✓Others

might have felt scared about the threat of losing their property and citizenship. They, too, were determined to get to Jerusalem for the meeting.

On the third day, multitudes arrived and sat in the street or court by the Temple. The fear of God's wrath against their sin caused them to tremble. Also, a hard, cold, early-December rain was drenching their shuddering bodies. ✓Perhaps the people thought God's judgment was already falling on them.

Ezra, the priest and leader, stood to address the great crowd. "You have sinned and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. Now therefore, confess your sin to the LORD God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from your pagan wives."

The people's response

All the people shouted, "Yes! As you have said, so we must do. But there are many people here. It is raining hard, and we are not able to stand outside."

"This is not the work of one or two days, for many of us have sinned in this matter."

"Please, let all those in our cities who have taken pagan wives go to the judges of their cities ✓to divorce these wives and legally provide for them until the fierce wrath of our God is turned away from us in this matter."

So, the people did as was decided. Within ten days the first pagan wives were put away. After three months the whole matter had been settled. One hundred thirteen men, who are named in Ezra 10, had put away their wives and, we assume, had provided for their well-being. Many of these men were priests, who should have taught the people the right way rather than live the wrong way!

God hates divorce, but in this large-scale transgression, putting away the pagan wives was the only remedy for the disease of spiritual corruption.

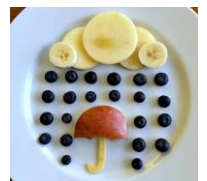
¹According to Edersheim and Gill.

Lessons from this lesson:

- We see Jesus:
When Jesus was on earth, He spoke of marriage as a good thing. Indeed, marriage can be the best experience of earthly life. However, when He comes again ("after the resurrection"), those who believe in Jesus as their Saviour will experience even more indescribable joy than marriage gives.
- God hates divorce. Don't think of this story as an excuse to get divorced even if you marry an unbeliever. The New Testament has some advice for one in this situation (1 Corinthians 7:12–16). Rather, think of this story as a warning not to marry someone who is unsaved—who doesn't know Christ as personal Saviour. That means don't even date them, for dating eventually leads to marriage.
- When it's time to do a right thing, don't let anything stand in your way—even weather.
- Mourn and pray over national sins or sins of God's people. Pray for repentance. Shecaniah hadn't married a pagan wife; yet, he prayed as if the sins of the other people were his sins to confess.

Activities:

- Play dough: raindrops
- Snack: Banana or bread clouds with blueberry raindrops (no umbrella) as found a third of the page down at [37 Fabulous Food Crafts for Kids](#).



- Kneel as Ezra might have—on knees with head bowed and hands either lifted up or extended in front.
 - Watch a 2.5 minute video found at [Bible Stories for the Young : Stories](#). Scroll down more than halfway. The story of Ezra will be on the left.
 - Review questions: (Game: Beware of this one. A student who answers a question correctly may spray water from a spray bottle *one squirt into the air over the other students*. If this one rule is broken, the teacher may need to hold the hand of the answering student to be sure water is sprayed correctly. Or, Another idea is to cut out raindrops to place in a pocket chart or on a flannelgraph board.
1. What great sin had been going on before Ezra arrived in Jerusalem? [Men had been marrying pagan women.]
 2. Why was this a sin? [God's Law had forbidden marriage with unbelievers.]
 3. Why would God think this kind of marriage was wrong? [Because it caused people eventually to turn away from the one true God to false gods.]
 4. What did Ezra do when he heard this bad news? [Tore his clothes, pulled out his hair, sat down by the Temple in grief and in weeping.]
 5. What did Ezra do at the time of the evening sacrifice? [Fell to his knees and prayed.]
 6. What did Shecaniah suggest Ezra do? [Have all who had married pagan women promise to put away their wives.]
 7. How did the men respond to this vow? [They promised to do it.]
 8. Why are we imitating rain in answering these questions? [Because when the people gathered and Ezra proposed the putting away, it was raining.]

Memory Verse[s]:

Review Psalm 1:1 and 2. The video at [Bing Videos](#) is a great aid in learning this psalm. Song sheet is below.

Review definitions: *Blessed* is the condition of joy that is free from evil. *Counsel* is advice. The three words—*wicked*, *sinners*, and *scoffers*—all describe someone in rebellion against God and His ways. The *law of the Lord* is the Bible, the Word of God. To *meditate* is to think with deep study.

- **1** Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.
3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.
4 The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
6 for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Handwork: Author's Personal Note: I thought rain sticks would be a great craft for today's story. However, when I looked for instructions, I learned that rain sticks are/were used to attract the attention of rain gods. "To make rain sticks," I thought, "is the exact opposite of what I want to teach these kids, for making them would certainly illustrate the story from the viewpoint of the false gods—sparking interest in a false god."

- Here's an idea from <http://www.preschooleducation.com/aweather.shtml>
- "Walking in the Rain" (Original Author Unknown). Items needed: glue, paper, toothpicks [or plastic forks], blue food coloring, small bowls or other containers, crayons and markers
Directions: Use blue food coloring to tint small containers of glue. Ask children to draw a picture [or use the clip art picture of a crowd at the end of this lesson]. Have kids dot over the picture with toothpicks [or plastic forks] dipped into the tinted glue, creating a falling rain scene. [You might also glue fiber fill or cotton to the sky for clouds.]

priests

Levites

abomination

guilt

iniquity

pagan

covenant

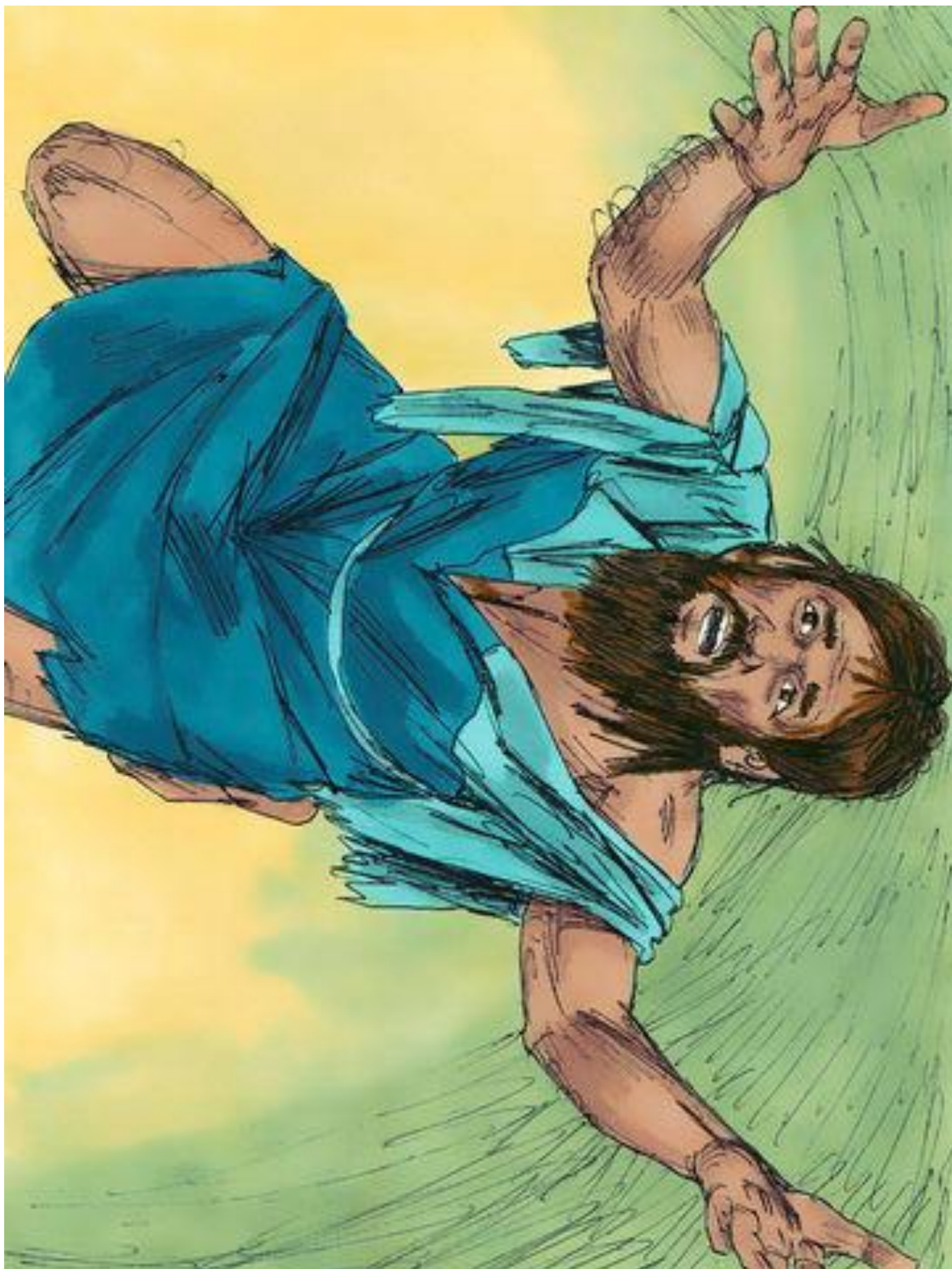


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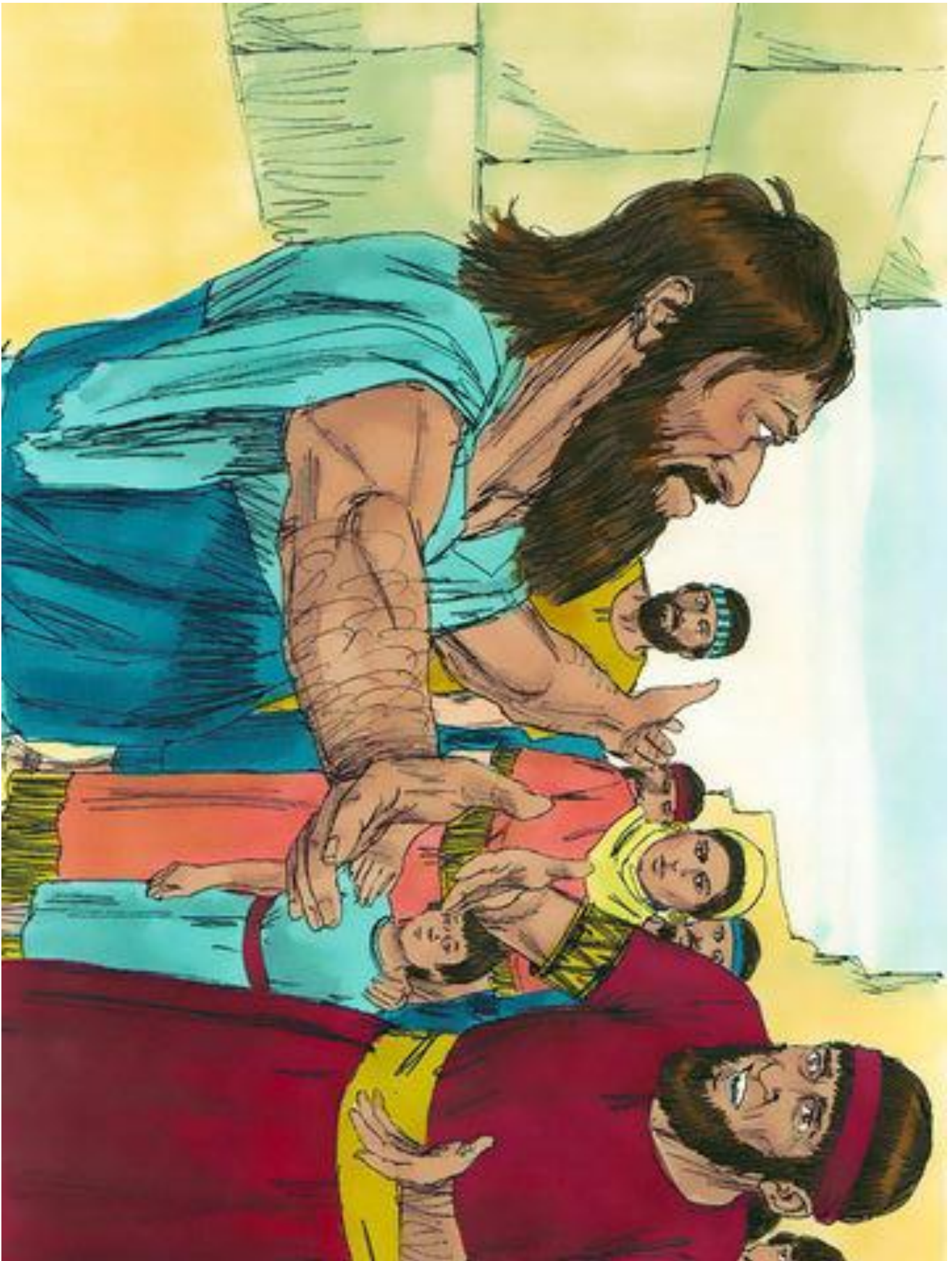


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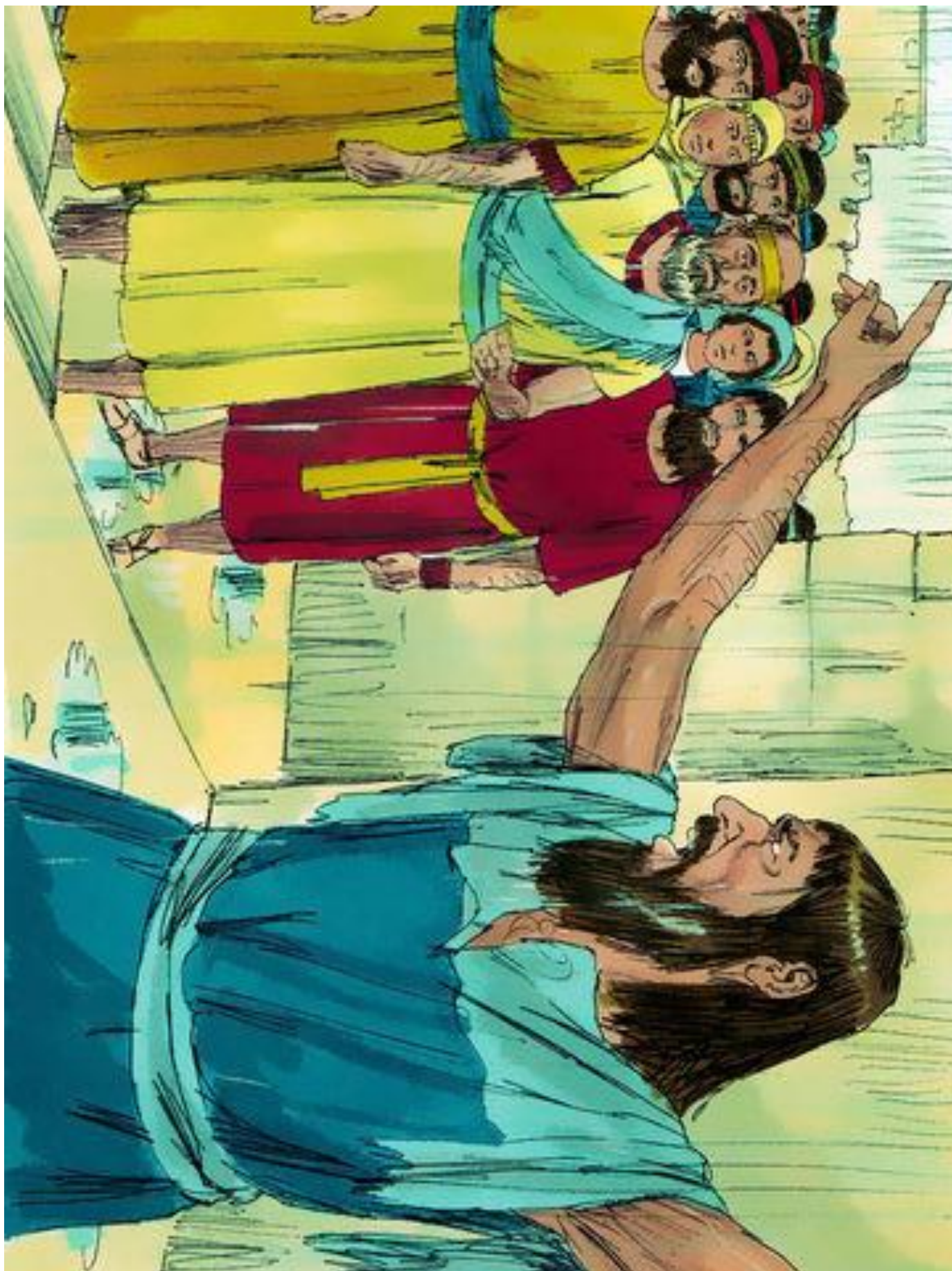


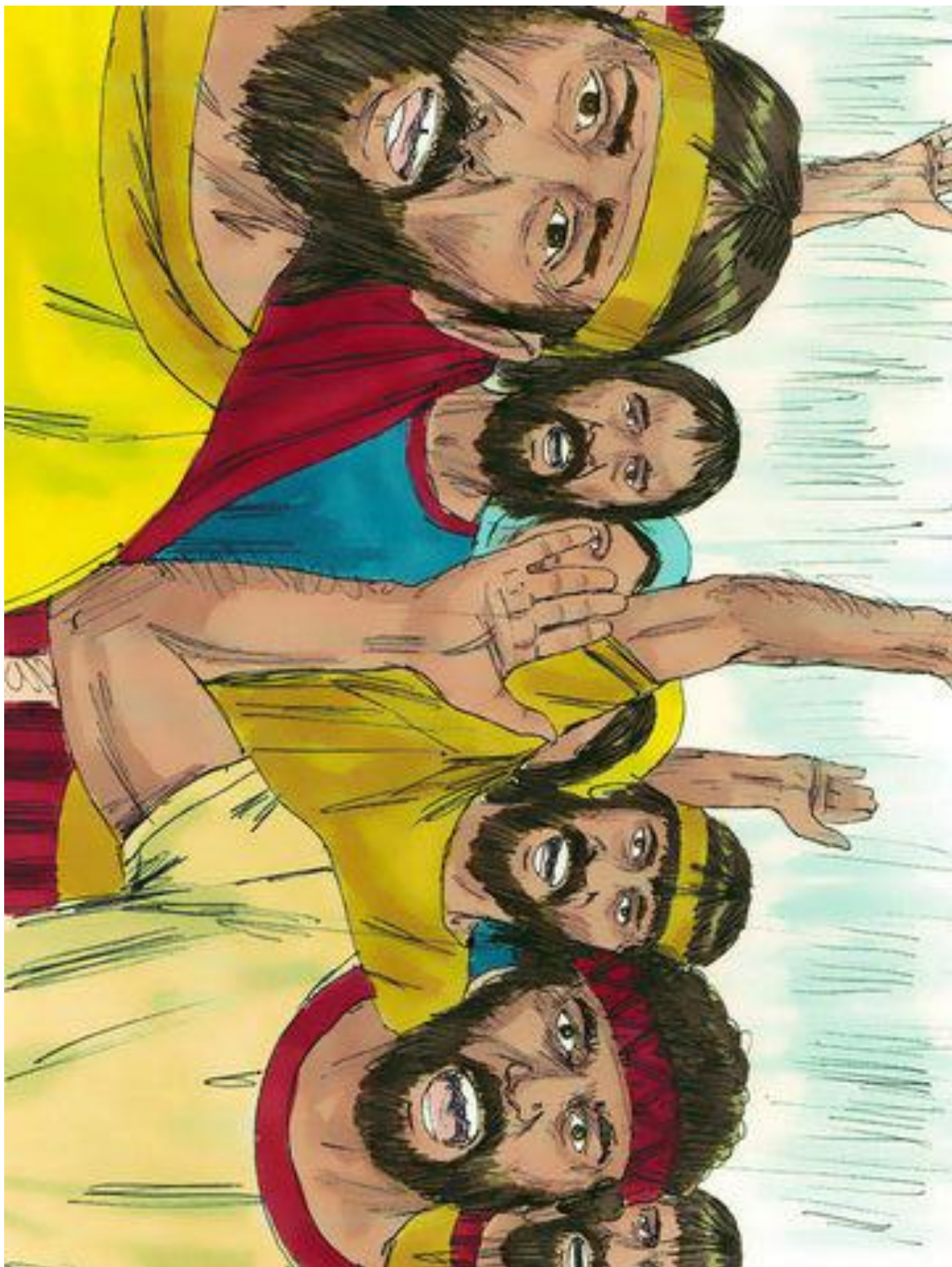


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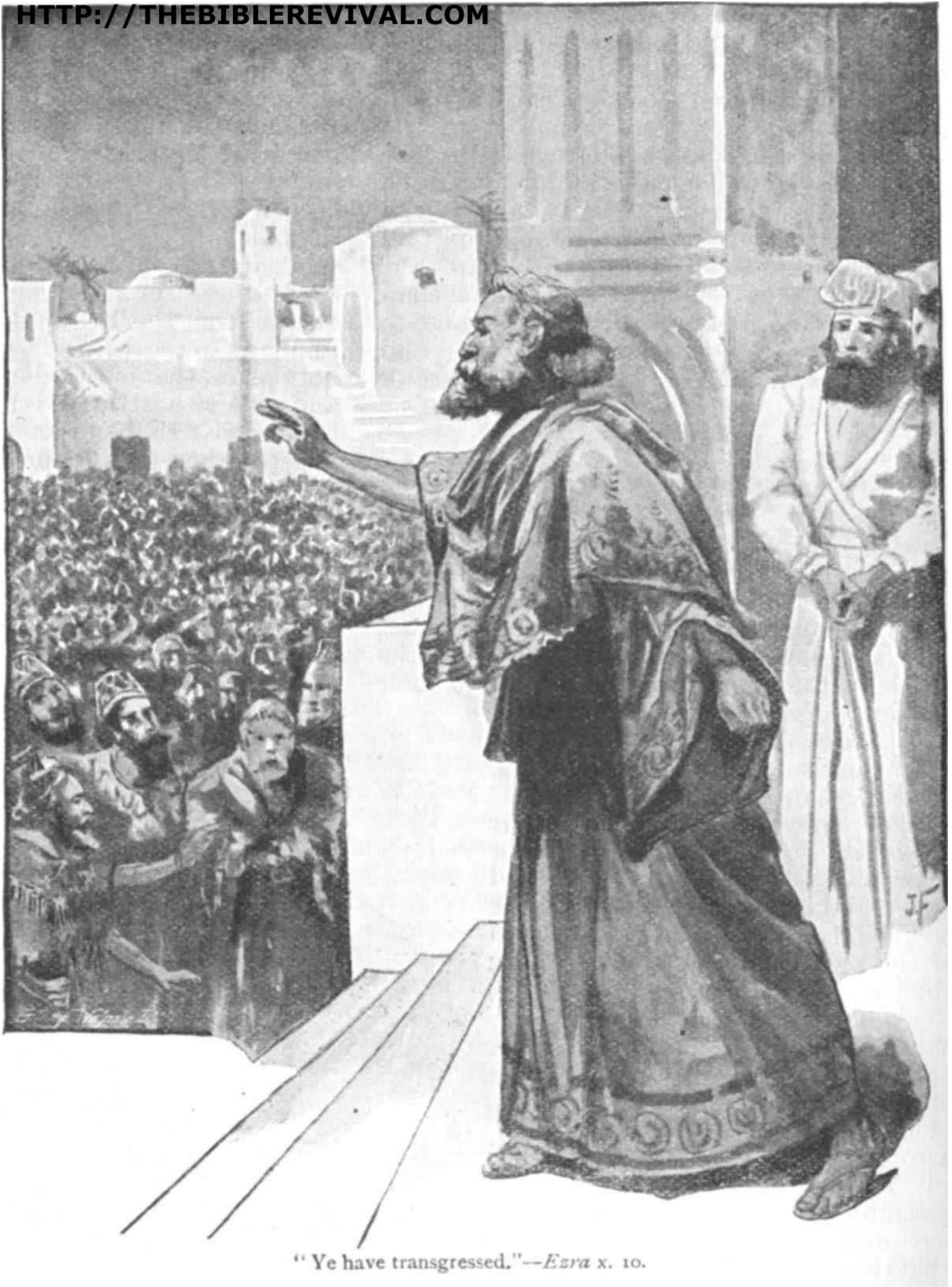


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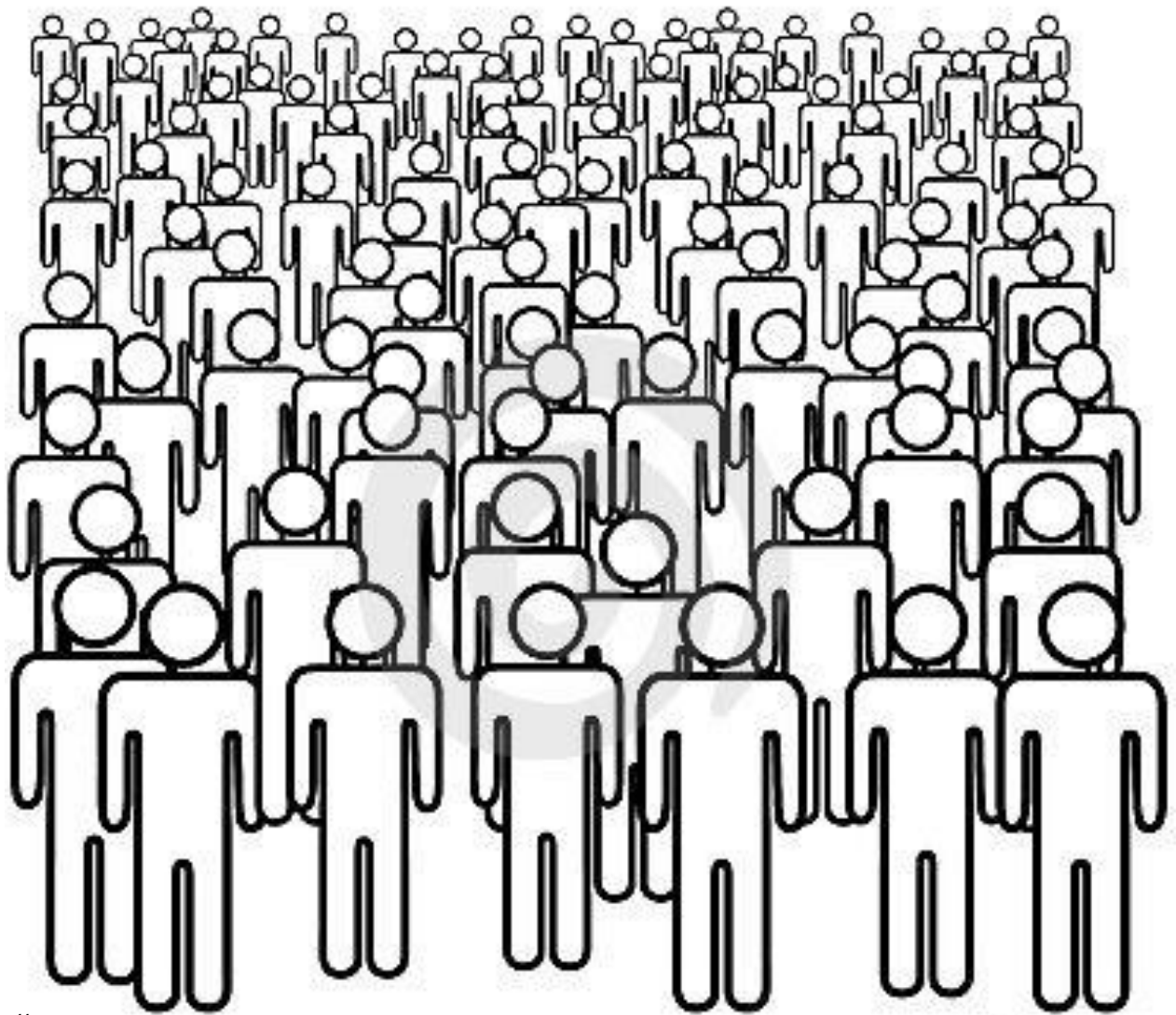


People God Said Not
to Marry
in Deuteronomy 7:1-3.

Hittites
Girgashites
Amorites
Canaanites
Perizzites
Hivites
Jebusites

People Whom the
Jews Married
in Ezra 9:1.

Canaanites
Hittites
Perizzites
Jebusites
Ammonites
(descendants of Lot)
Moabites
(descendants of Lot)
Egyptians
Amorites



“Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It *was* the ninth month, on the twentieth *day* of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of *this* matter. and for the great rain” (Ezra 10:11).

Psalm 1 - Blessed Is the Man

Psalm 1 - ESV

Betsy James



1 Bless-ed is the man who walks not in the coun-sel of the wick-ed, nor

5 stands in the way of sin-ners, nor sits in the seat of scof-fers; 2 but his de -

10 light is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he med - i - tates day and

15 night. (tick, tick, tick) 3 He is like a tree plant-ed by streams of wat-er that

20 yields its fruit in its sea-son and its leaf does not with-er (with-er) In

25 all that he does he pros-pers. (pros-pers!) 4 The wick-ed are not so, but are like

30 chaff that the wind drives a - way. 5 There - fore the wick-ed will not stand in the judg-ment,

34 nor sin-ners in the con - gre - ga - tion of the righ - teous. 6 for the Lord knows the

40 way of the righ - eous, but the way of the wick-ed will per-ish. (per-ish,)

