

## Chapter Ten

### PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

1. What particular idea do you think brought the people to tears?
2. Do you think Ezra was justified in advocating divorce?
3. Why do you suppose the priests are mentioned first among those who had committed this sin, and again of those who corrected their conduct?
4. Do you think the list of names is placed here as a means of punishing those who had sinned, or of honoring those who had repented?

### OUTLINE

Topic of the chapter: How the problem of mixed marriages was resolved.

- D. The community is cleansed, and a list of offenders is given.
1. A decision is reached by those who heard Ezra pray (vss. 1-4).
  2. The decision is shared by the leaders, and an assembly is ordered (vss. 5-8).
  3. The decision is accepted by all, in the assembly (vss. 9-15).
  4. The decision is carried out (vss. 16-19).
  5. A list is made of those who complied (vss. 20-44).

### TEXT AND VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENT

D. The community is cleansed, and a list of the offenders is given.

1. A decision is reached by those who heard Ezra pray.

#### TEXT, 10:1-4

- 1 Now while Ezra was praying and making confession; weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God, a very large assembly, men, women, and children, gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept bitterly.
- 2 And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said to Ezra, "We have been unfaithful to our

- God, and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel in spite of this.
- 3 "So now let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the 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 this matter is your responsibility, but we will be with you; be courageous and act."

### COMMENT

In *verse 1* there is a switch from the first to the third person; we have observed (see comments on 5:4, where Ezra uses the first person where we would expect the third person) that this is frequently done in the O.T., sometimes for no discernible reason. It is always hazardous to build great critical theories on something as small as a personal pronoun, especially in Hebrew.

As Ezra wept, many others were attracted to the gathering (9:4 has already spoken of a number who had been attracted by Ezra's conduct) and joined him in weeping; probably because they joined him in making confession. Perhaps some were realizing for the first time the consequences which their sins could have for the entire nation, for sin and disobedience to God is never a merely private affair. They had probably gathered out of sympathy or curiosity, because of Ezra's obvious pain; but they would surely not have responded thus unless they were as convinced of the critical nature of the problem as he was.

*Verse 2:* Shecaniah came forward and took the lead in acknowledging the wrong, although he is not named among the offenders, nor was he a priest. Rather, he was of the family of Elam (8:7), of the people of Israel (common people distinguished from priests and Levites), though not its leader. The name of his father, Jehiel, appears again in vs. 26, also as one of the family of Elam; this raises the possibility that Shecaniah's own father was among those whose sin Shecaniah was confessing. It was a common name, however, and this cannot be said with certainty.

*Verse 3* suggests the making of a covenant. This was an elaborate and serious process. More detail will be given under the

Word Studies for this chapter. It was suggested that the covenant require divorce ("putting away") as a solution to the problem. Certainly this was no easy solution nor was the problem an easy problem. When sin enters the picture there are bound to be some tragic results.

Reference has already been made (see 9:2) to the possibility of conversion to maintain the marriage.

Those who tremble at God's commandment have been mentioned before, at 9:4, assembling about Ezra as he began his prayer. The trembling may express a number of things in the O.T. In I Sam. 13:7 it is used of fear before a battle. In II Ki. 4:13 it is used of care and concern that a servant girl had for her master. There is still a place for fear as a part of reverence toward God as we think of the consequences of violating His word.

There were two groups, then, who gathered about Ezra: the public minded religiously concerned of 9:4, and the more diversified group in 10:1.

Verse 4 pledges the support of all those people for whom Shecaniah was the spokesman, in supporting Ezra in his demands before the country's leaders.

## 2. The decision is shared by the leaders, and an assembly is ordered.

### TEXT, 10:5-8.

- 5 Then Ezra rose and made the leading priests, the Levites, and all Israel, take oath that they would do according to this proposal; so they took the oath.
- 6 Then Ezra rose from before the house of God and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib. Although he went there, he did not eat bread, nor drink water, for he was mourning over the unfaithfulness of the exiles.
- 7 And they made a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the exiles, that they should assemble at Jerusalem,

8 and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the leaders and the elders, all his possessions should be forfeited and he himself excluded from the assembly of the exiles.

### COMMENT

His next step was to invite compliance by all of the nation. He first got the support of the leaders of each of the three groups: priests, Levites, and all Israel. These were required to take an oath; for more on this, see the Word Studies that follow.

According to *verse 6* he spent the night in fasting and mourning in the quarters of one of the priests in the Temple. Here in all likelihood the two worked out the details of their course of action.

Some speculation has arisen whether the Jehohanan of this verse is the high priest Johanan mentioned in the Elephantine Papyri. The idea is tremendously fascinating, but if it is so it would require dating this part of Ezra fifty years later than we had supposed: later, in fact, than Nehemiah. As it is, the Jehohanan of verse 6 is not identified as the high priest; in fact, the book of Ezra never refers to any individual, even Jeshua, by this title.

With *verse 7* their plan begins to unfold; they call an assembly of all the exiles at Jerusalem.

*Verse 8* specifies that they (the men) must appear within three days. This would not have been unreasonable since they still had not spread out very far from Jerusalem. The authority back of the order was that of the leaders and elders. Penalty for not appearing in person would be the loss of all their possessions, and their expulsion from the community. The land basically was the Lord's, and it was distributed among the people in His name for their use, though He continued to hold title to it: therefore their continued occupancy was conditioned on their obedience to Him.

## 3. The decision is accepted by all, in the assembly.

## TEXT, 10:9-15

- 9 So all the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days. It was the ninth month on the twentieth of the month, and all the people sat in the open square before the house of God, trembling because of this matter and the heavy rain.
- 10 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have been unfaithful and have married foreign wives adding to the guilt of Israel.
- 11 "Now, therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers, and do His will; and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives."
- 12 Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, "That's right! As you have said, so it is our duty to do."
- 13 "But there are many people, it is the rainy season, and we are not able to stand in the open. Nor can the task be done in one or two days, for we have transgressed greatly in this matter.
- 14 "Let our leaders represent the whole assembly and let all those in our cities who have married foreign wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and judges of each city, until the fierce anger of our God on account of this matter is turned away from us."
- 15 Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah opposed this, with Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite supporting them.

## COMMENT

*Verse 9* indicates full compliance with this order, from the men throughout the territory of Judah and Benjamin where the exiles had settled. The latter half of the ninth month would be in our December, which was the rainy season in their land. No building

would be large enough for the entire male population, so they met in the Temple yard, shivering because of the seriousness of the occasion and the discomfort of the rain.

In *verse 10* Ezra charged them with their sin.

*Verse 11* speaks of two groups from which they were to be separated: (1) the people of the land, possibly referring here to the foreign men whom some of the women of Israel had married; and (2) the foreign wives, whom men of Israel had taken. The offense could work both ways (see 9:12), and both must be corrected.

*Verse 12* voices their acknowledgement of the rightness of what had been said, and their decisive acceptance of the need of separation.

In *verse 13* the men point to mechanical problems in carrying out this command: the rain; discomfort of standing in the open; legal complications in correcting such a serious offense.

Their request (*verse 14*) was that enough time be given so that orderly procedures may be followed: appointments were to be made for all offending couples to come before the elders and judges of their cities (the elders had always had such responsibilities), till the task was completed. They evidently reasoned that if marriage was a public ceremony, then the separation also was to be made publicly.

*Verse 15* gives the names of two who opposed this procedure, though their reason is not stated. We do not know if they objected to the delay, the procedure, or to the action itself, though *verse 12* indicated unanimous agreement up to that point. Their objections were apparently answered satisfactorily by two other speakers, as named.

#### 4. The decision is carried out.

##### TEXT, 10:16-19

16 But the exiles did so. And Ezra the priest selected men who were heads of fathers' households for each of their fathers'

- households, all of them by name. So they convened on the first day of the tenth month to investigate the matter.
- 17 And they finished investigating all the men who had married foreign wives by the first of the first month.
- 18 And among the sons of the priests who had married foreign wives were found of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brothers; Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah.
- 19 And they pledged to put away their wives, and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their offense.

### COMMENT

*Verse 16* shows Ezra once more appointing men from the various households (clans) to help with this responsibility. These assembled within ten or eleven days. This is the point where we may ask what they had to investigate; was it only to discover every person in their communities who had offended or were they setting policies to check for sincere conversions among the parties involved?

*Verse 17* relates the completion of the investigation three months later, on the first day of the year, exactly a year after Ezra had assembled his group of exiles to go up to Jerusalem (7:9).

*Verse 18* demonstrates the extent of the sin, even within the priesthood. (Notice that again, as at verse 5, the priests are listed first.) The book began with recognition for the fine work of the high priest Jeshua, son of Jozadak (2:2; 3:2). It ends with the acknowledgment of the sin of some of his descendants and relatives. So the best of institutions must always be subject to reexamination.

According to *verse 19*, the offending priests gave their hands (literal meaning of "pledged") to put away their foreign wives; we are reminded how far back the binding nature of a handshake goes, along with some of our other customs. This would save their land from the continued burden of their error; but what about the wrong already done? The heathen women were themselves victims of an injury which could never be righted in

this world. Therefore, to atone for their guilt, the priests offered a trespass offering. Details of this are given in Lev. 5:14-19; Num. 15:22-31. It was, you will notice, for unintentional sins (Lev. 5:17f); there is no sacrifice in the O.T. for deliberate sins (Num. 15:30f). This suggests that those who were involved may not have been aware of the law; perhaps this particular law had not been sufficiently publicized. Or they may not have been impressed with the seriousness of their act. Evidently they had not deliberately intended to disobey one of God's laws. Most of our sins, then and now, probably would come under this category, because few people intend to do wrong deliberately. In most cases we are deceived, or misled, or thoughtless; but the consequences are still the same, and the damage is just as real.

While only the priests are mentioned as making this offering, it is possible that the other offenders did likewise.

### 5. A list is made of those who complied.

#### TEXT, 10:20-44

- 20 And of the sons of Immer there were Hanani and Zebadiah;  
 21 and of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uzziyah;  
 22 and of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasaah.  
 23 And of the Levites there were Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (that is, Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.  
 24 And of the singers there was Eliashib; and of the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.  
 25 And of Israel, of the sons of Parosh there were Ramiah, Izziah, Malchijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malchijah, and Benaiah;  
 26 and of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah;  
 27 and of the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza;



- 28 and of the sons of Bebai: Johohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai;
- 29 and of the sons of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, and Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth;
- 30 and of the sons of Pahath-moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh;
- 31 and of the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Isshijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon,
- 32 Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah;
- 33 of the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei;
- 34 of the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel,
- 35 Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluhi,
- 36 Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib,
- 37 Mattaniah, Mattenai, Jaasu,
- 38 Bani, Binnui, Shimei,
- 39 Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah,
- 40 Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai,
- 41 Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah,
- 42 Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph.
- 43 Of the sons of Nebo there were Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah.
- 44 All these had married foreign wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children.

### COMMENT

It is obvious that this is only a partial list, perhaps of the most influential of the people involved.

*Verses 20-22* continue the list of names from the priesthood; *verses 23, 24* give names of Levites and their associates; *verses 25-43*, of Israel.

No mention is made in *verse 44* of what was done for the continued support of the women and children, whether they received some form of alimony or whether they married the men who had been divorced by their Israelite wives. Such problems could only be dealt with on an individual basis, and this would reach beyond the scope of Ezra's book.

## WORD STUDIES

**COVENANT** (vs. 3, Berith): comes from the verb, "eat." To make (literally, cut) a covenant, persons butchered and cut up a domestic vegetarian (peaceful) animal (see Gen. 15) and arrived at their agreements around a table of good fellowship. Peace treaties, religious obligations, personal contracts were all sealed in this way. God's covenant with man always had this connotation of fellowship, or sharing, including His obligation to bless if the covenant was kept.

**TAKE OATH** (vs. 8, Shaba): swear, "to seven oneself." Seven, a sacred number, calls attention also to offerings that would be made to seal an oath (Gen. 21:28ff).

## SUMMARY

As Ezra prayed a crowd gathered and entered into his feelings of guilt and sorrow and reverence. One of them, Shecaniah, spoke for all to encourage Ezra to lead in covenanting with God to correct the sin of marriage to heathen mates, believing that there was still hope. Leaders of the priests, Levites, and citizens took an oath to support Ezra in this reform. An assembly of all the males throughout the area of Judah and Benjamin was called, under penalty of forfeiting all their property. In a matter of days these assembled in spite of a heavy rain, and became convinced of the necessity of confessing their wrong and amending it. Ezra appointed leaders for each community to investigate each offending household. On the first day of the new year, about three and a half months after Ezra had prayed, the investigations were completed and the community of Israel had separated itself from entanglements with foreign spouses. The decision was completed with pledges and offerings to God; the list of those whose names were affixed to the agreement began with priests, contained Levites, and concluded with many of the prominent people throughout Israel.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who was the man who helped Ezra the most, to correct the evil?
2. What response did he get from the general population?
3. Whom did Ezra select to investigate and deal with offenders?
4. How long did the process take?

## REFLECTIONS ON EZRA

The book of Ezra began with captives returning to Israel especially to rebuild their Altar and Temple. A second band returned and were especially involved in the purification of the religious life.

The book has presented us with a contrast between (1) growing awareness of and concern for the Gentiles, and (2) exclusiveness, forbidding marriages to Gentiles. On the one hand, help was obtained from a foreign king, his cabinet, and taxes on neighboring lands to help Israel build the Temple; even some of the labor came from other lands. Some foreigners may even have been included in the migration from Babylonia to Judah. Their continuation as a people depended on the day-to-day favor of foreigners.

On the other hand, help of the Samaritans had been flatly rejected, and marriages with foreigners had been annulled and forbidden for the future. Israel had to live between these two tensions.

But so must the church today. It must live in the world; it cannot withdraw from it, but must in fact mingle with the Pharisees and publicans, the pure and the impure, the household of Caesar and Simon the sorcerer and Saul the persecutor; it cannot obey its Lord, grow, or even survive without conversions from these sources.

But it must keep itself free from the entanglements and defilements of that world. It must maintain its principles and transform the lives that it touches into the likeness of its Master.

May the handling of the problems in the book of Ezra assist us in the handling of those which are distinctive to our day.

## PROJECT

Can you recall, chapter by chapter, what is in the book of Ezra? The first and last chapters are easy: 1—Cyrus' proclamation permitting the return from captivity; 10—Mixed marriages abandoned. Next notice chapters 4 and 7: 4—Rebuilding of the Temple ceases; 7—Ezra arrives with more returnees. Now fill in the gaps: 2—List of returnees, first expedition; 3—Altar set up. After chapter 4 (Rebuilding of the Temple ceases) comes 5—Rebuilding is resumed; 6—Darius' decree, and completion of the Temple. After 7 (Ezra arrives with more returnees), 8—Names of returnees, and description of the trip; 9—Ezra hears of the problem of mixed marriages; then you remember 10.

Put these titles on separate cards without the chapter numbers, mix them up, and practice arranging them correctly.

## DATES TO REMEMBER (All are Before Christ.)

- 538 Cyrus conquered Babylon
- 536 Cyrus freed captive Israelites to return home and rebuild Temple
- 536 Work on the Temple stopped
- 520 Temple work resumed
- 516 Temple work completed
- 475 Events of the Book of Esther
- 458 Ezra brought another band of returnees
- 457 Ezra's reforms were completed
- 445 Nehemiah's first mission to Jerusalem
- 433 Nehemiah's second mission to Jerusalem