**Ezra**

**Chapters 9-10**

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**Chapter Nine**

**Ezra 9:1-2**

*Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, those of 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 as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness."*

Ezra arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month and this message dealing with intermarriage was announced on the 17th day of the ninth month (10:8 with 10:9) so four and one half months had passed since he arrived. We are not told who brought this information to Ezra but it must have been one of the ordinary members of the community rather than the leaders since they were guilty of this infringement also. The peoples of the lands would have been people brought into Samaria by the Assyrians who had migrated south as well as Edomites and others who had come into the Judean territory. Ezra lists eight groups who were the original inhabitants of Canaan before the Hebrew conquest such as mentioned in:

* Exo 3:8 *"So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.*
* Exo 3:17 *"So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey."'*
* Exo 13:5 *"It shall be when the LORD brings you to the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall observe this rite in this month.*
* Exo 23:*23 "For My angel will go before you and bring you in to the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will completely destroy them.*
* Exo 23:28 *"I will send hornets ahead of you so that they will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you.*

But they were not to make a covenant with them or to serve their gods:

Exo 23:30-33 *"I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land. (31) "I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River Euphrates; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you. (32) "You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods. (33) "They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."*

At the time of the postexilic period only the Ammonites, Moabites, and Egyptians were still there: *All of the people who were left of the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, who were not of Israel,* (2 Chron 8:7)

The Perizzites is a designation of those from a place translated as “hamlet”. The Jebusites were occupants of Jerusalem when it was known as Jebus before the conquest by David. The Ammonites were descendants of Lot by the incestuous union with his younger daughter (Gen 19:38) and lived in Ammon. The Moabites were descendants of Lot by his older daughter (Gen 19:37) and were from Moab. The Amorites is a name derived from the Akkadian Amurru, meaning from Syria.

In verse 2 he states the reason for this intermarriage being such a problem. Such intermarriage causes the holy race to be intermingled with those not chosen but who had occupied the land. The “holy race” is literally “the holy seed”. He states that even the princes and leaders led the way in this problem. The problem was initiated earlier in the time of Moses:

Psa 106:34-39 *They did not destroy the peoples, As the LORD commanded them, (35) But they mingled with the nations And learned their practices, (36) And served their idols, Which became a snare to them. (37) They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons, (38) And shed innocent blood, The blood of their sons and their daughters, Whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; And the land was polluted with the blood. (39) Thus they became unclean in their practices, And played the harlot in their deeds.*

We see that the problem is that God had chosen Israel to be a holy nation and they were to be different than the other people because of their relationship to God:

* Exo 19:5-6 *'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; (6) and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."*
* Lev 19:1-2 *Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: (2) "Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.*
* Deu 7:6 *"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.*

Intermarriage would result in their practicing customs of the other people in serving their gods. Righteousness and purity were the concepts in question (see Psa 106:35 above). The word “unfaithfulness” refers to a breach of trust and is used elsewhere of persons violating their covenant relationship with God:

Deut 7:3-4 *"Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. (4) "For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you.*

All of these passages would have been included in Ezra’s teachings of the law in which he was an expert.

**Ezra 9: 3-6**

*When I heard about this matter, I tore my garment and my robe, and pulled some of the hair from my head and my beard, and sat down appalled. (4) Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel on account of the unfaithfulness of the exiles gathered to me, and I sat appalled until the evening offering. (5) But at the evening offering I arose from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn, and I fell on my knees and stretched out my hands to the LORD my God; (6) and I said, "O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens.*

This is an extreme reaction by Ezra to this news and reflects his anguish at learning about the people’s choosing to bring into their practice the customs and religious practices of these other people. When Nehemiah found out about this practice he pulled the hair of offenders out of indignation (13:25) whereas Ezra pulled out his own hair out of sorrow. Those who trembled at the words of God would be those who really took God’s word seriously and trembled at human sin. Today Christians should be similarly trembling at the words of God in our time of acceptance and broad-mindedness. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ implies a lifestyle that should be distinct from that of those living by the standards of the world. We are to live those standards as we go, teach, baptize, and disciple:

Matt 28:18-20 *And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (19) "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

Christians live in a society that increasingly teaches an anti-Christian worldview. The NT does not teach against intermarrying between different ethnic groups but we are not to marry with those who do not have a faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior:

2Cor 6:14-18 *Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? (15) Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? (16) Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. (17) "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you. (18) "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.*

Ezra sat with fellow believers until the time of the evening offering that was offered at twilight or about three PM (Num 28:4; Ex 12:6)). They probably initially met with him in the morning so he must have been in this position for several hours. Ezra then stood up revealing his torn garments and then fell forward on his knees as he stretched out his hands to the LORD, his God (Exod 9:29). Being on his knees demonstrated his humility and raising his hands was a statement of his dependence upon God for help.

Ezra then showed how he identified with the community of believers in that although he was not guilty of this sin he was a leader of the community and so shared in the guilt. He states that **our** iniquities and **our** guilt as risen to the throne of God. Because of this iniquity and guilt he is ashamed and embarrassed to lift up his face to God. The KJV translates the second verb as “blush” showing that blushing demonstrates his embarrassment. A verse in Jeremiah states how people are so evil they cannot blush:

Jer 8:12 *"Were they ashamed because of the abomination they had done? They certainly were not ashamed, And they did not know how to blush; Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time of their punishment they shall be brought down," Says the LORD.*

I believe our society has also reached the point where they cannot blush. Ezra probably then remained in the kneeling position with his face toward the ground and his arms lifted to God.

**Ezra 9: 7-8**

*"Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt, and on account of 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 and to plunder and to open shame, as it is this day. (8) "But now for a brief moment grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage.*

The Jews were especially conscious of their background as indicated by saying “the days of our fathers”. Ezra had just returned from many years of captivity in Babylon as a result of the sins of the people when they, including their kings and priests, were turned over to the hands of the kings of the lands. By these lands he meant the lands of Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. He knew that their seventy years of captivity and their present captivity in Persia were because of their sin. Scripture vividly describes the sword as the work of the judgment of God such as in: *"Son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the LORD.' Say, 'A sword, a sword sharpened And also polished!* (Ezek 21:9). The “open shame” is often translated as “humiliation”.

After the conquest of the Babylonians the Jews fell under the Persians, Alexander the Great, the Ptolemies, the Seleucids, the Romans, the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Turks, and the British. Then in 1948 the Lord had them established as an independent state. He knew that God had now led a remnant back into their promised land and he had just praised God for bringing them across a dangerous land to rest in this “peg” in His holy place. The peg is literally a tent peg indicating they had been given a temporary place in God’s kingdom. The concept of a remnant is very important in scripture. Sometimes it refers to those who will return to God in the midst of a reform:

Isa 10:20-21 *Now in that day the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped, will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. (21) A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.*

Sometimes it refers to those returning from an exile:

* Jer 42:1-3 *Then all the commanders of the forces, Johanan the son of Kareah, Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people both small and great approached (2) and said to Jeremiah the prophet, "Please let our petition come before you, and pray for us to the LORD your God, that is for all this remnant; because we are left but a few out of many, as your own eyes now see us, (3) that the LORD your God may tell us the way in which we should walk and the thing that we should do."*
* Zec 8:6 *"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'If it is too difficult in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, will it also be too difficult in My sight?' declares the LORD of hosts.*
* Zec 8:11-12 *'But now I will not treat the remnant of this people as in the former days,' declares the LORD of hosts. (12) 'For there will be peace for the seed: the vine will yield its fruit, the land will yield its produce and the heavens will give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to inherit all these things.*
* Jer 23:3 *"Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply.*
* Jer 31:6-7 *"For there will be a day when watchmen On the hills of Ephraim call out, 'Arise, and let us go up to Zion, To the LORD our God.'" (7) For thus says the LORD, "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, And shout among the chief of the nations; Proclaim, give praise and say, 'O LORD, save Your people, The remnant of Israel.'*
* Zec 14:1-*2 Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. (2) For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city.*

All humanity has been in exile since the Garden of Eden and one day a remnant will go to be in heaven with God! They are now a remnant inside a foreign land where God will give them some revival while still in that bondage. To enlighten their eyes literally means to revive the spirit or to bring vitality and joy such as in:

* 1Sam 14:27 *\ But Jonathan had not heard when his father put the people under oath; therefore, he put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes brightened.*
* 1Sam 14:29 *\Then Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. See now, how my eyes have brightened because I tasted a little of this honey.*

**Ezra 9:9-12**

*"For we are slaves; yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended lovingkindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us reviving to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem. (10) "Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, (11) which You have commanded by Your servants the prophets, 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 end to end and with their impurity. (12) 'So now do not give your daughters to their sons nor take their daughters to your sons, and never seek their peace or their prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it as an inheritance to your sons forever.'*

They even now remain subjects of the Persian Empire but Ezra recognizes that God has blessed them and they have been given a new identity as a religious community. We see this recently in several actions of foreign rulers. Cyrus (539-530) gave them permission to return (Ezra 1) and his son Cambyses (529-522) is not named in the Bible but he favored them as history tells us. Darius I (522-486) renewed the decree of Ezra (Ezra 6) and his son, Xerxes (485-465) granted Jews privileges and protection (Ezra 8-10). Artaxerxes I (464-424) gave authorizations to Ezra (Ezra 7) and Nehemiah (Neh 1-2). He praises God for reviving them as they have rebuilt the temple and given them a wall of protection from their enemies. Of course he is not referring to the actual physical wall that has not yet been built but to the protection God is giving them from their enemies in Judah and even in Jerusalem.

He acknowledges that they have broken His laws and forsaken His commandments as he refers to some of them from God’s servants the prophets:

* Lev 18:25 *'For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants.*
* 2Ki 16:3 *But he (Ahaz) walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and even made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had driven out from before the sons of Israel.*
* Deu 7:1-3 *"When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, (2) and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. (3) "Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons.*
* Deu 11:8 *"You shall therefore keep every commandment which I am commanding you today, so that you may be strong and go in and possess the land into which you are about to cross to possess it;*
* 2Ki 21:16 *Moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; besides his sin with which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the LORD.*
* Isa 1:19-20 *"If you consent and obey, You will eat the best of the land; (20) "But if you refuse and rebel, You will be devoured by the sword." Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*

We must all remember that God has given us certain ethical standards by which we should live and also know the warnings He has given us when we disobey Him. When Ezra says “do not seek their peace” he is referring to the command against making treaties with Ammonites and Moabites:

Deu 23:3-6 *"No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD, (4) because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. (5) "Nevertheless, the LORD your God was not willing to listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you because the LORD your God loves you. (6) "You shall never seek their peace or their prosperity all your days.*

In the NT period the problems of interfaith marriage was recognized also. Marriages with unbelievers were condemned and widows were told to marry within the faith:

* 2Co 6:14 *Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?*
* 1Co 7:39 *A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.*

**Ezra 9: 13-14**

*"After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and our great guilt, since You our God have requited us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us an escaped remnant as this, (14) shall we again break Your commandments and intermarry with the peoples who commit these abominations? Would You not be angry with us to the point of destruction, until there is no remnant nor any who escape?*

Ezra recognizes that it is only the mercy of God and none of their merits that have allowed them to be reestablished in their original homeland. He acknowledges that God has punished them far less than they deserve because of their transgressions. God’s anger burned against the Jews when they did not perform their covenant responsibilities (Deut 7:4; 11:17; 29:25-28; Josh 23:16; Judg 2:20). The scripture is consistent for the NT also emphasizes that it is only by the mercy of God that any remnant escapes the eternal punishment of God for our sins:

Rom 3:21-26 *But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, (22) even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; (23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (24) being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; (25) whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; (26) for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

He then asks a rhetorical question for certainly anyone who understands the commandments of God and His wrath at the breaking of those commandments should never repeat the offenses. This reminds me of the statements of Paul regarding repeating sin even when we know we have been forgiven:

Rom 6:12-15 *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, (13) and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (14) For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (15) What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!*

The answer to Ezra’s rhetorical question then is: “May it never be!” God has shown great mercy to them by showing His forgiveness by reestablishing them in Judah and Jerusalem. Grace should result in obedience:

Rom 12:1-2 *Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. (2) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

By this sinful act of intermarriage they are allowing themselves to be conformed to the world. Those who return to a sinful lifestyle after being shown mercy are revealing that they have not had an internal change:

* 2Pe 2:21-22 *For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. (22) It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire."*
* Pro 26:11 *Like a dog that returns to its vomit Is a fool who repeats his folly*.

Ezra states that if they continue to sin willfully they could reach the point when the anger of God will escalate to the point that their no longer exists any remnant, so none would escape the wrath of God.

**Ezra 9:15**

*"O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we have been left an escaped remnant, as it is this day; behold, we are before You in our guilt, for no one can stand before You because of this."*

Ezra continues his prayer by admitting their guilt and their total dependence upon the mercy of God. Our society is also waiting for the judgment of God because we have broken His commandments and continue to live a sinful life. The “righteousness” of God has several meanings but the root Hebrew word means “to conform to ethical standards”. So His righteousness results in actions according to His standards. It applies to God Himself: *Clouds and thick darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.* (Psa 97:2) God’s righteousness also results in His action of salvation: *Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.* (Psa 51:14) We also know from the NT that because of His righteousness, God will forgive us if we confess our sins: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (1 John 1:9)

Under His covenant God is righteous when He delivers His people. So although Ezra is thinking of their sin and the wrath of God he is also thinking of the covenant-salvation meaning of the righteousness of God for otherwise there is no hope for them as they have demonstrated their sinfulness by their sinful actions. Ezra knows there is still hope: *"Perhaps the house of Judah will hear all the calamity which I plan to bring on them, in order that every man will turn from his evil way; then I will forgive their iniquity and their sin."* (Jer 36:3)

**Chapter 10**

**Ezra 10:1-4**

*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) Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, 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."*

The rest of this book writes of Ezra in the third person. The weeping was done out loud and a very large number of people joined him in this demonstration of their great sorrow over their sin. The men were joined by women and children and they all wept loudly. The verb tense indicates that he kept throwing himself on the ground. The prophets and other leaders often used object lessons to attract attention such as:

* Isa 8:1-4 *Then the LORD said to me, "Take for yourself a large tablet and write on it in ordinary letters: Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey. (2) "And I will take to Myself faithful witnesses for testimony, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah." (3) So I approached the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. Then the LORD said to me, "Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz; (4) for before the boy knows how to cry out 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria."*
* Jer 27:1-2 *In the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying-- (2) thus says the LORD to me--"Make for yourself bonds and yokes and put them on your neck,*

Ezra was a very wise teacher as he waited for the people to respond and Shecaniah came forward to confess for himself and his family. This person is probably different from the Shecaniah of 8:3 and possibly his father is the same Jehiel mentioned in vv. 21 and 26 since he was of the family of Elam. If this is the same Jehiel then Shecaniah is renouncing the sinful marriage of his father. A large number of people came from the family of Elam in the first return from exile (1,254) as recorded in 2:7 and a smaller number came with Ezra (70) from 8:7. We will see in v. 26 that six members of the family of Elam were involved in intermarriages. Shecaniah becomes the spokesperson for the group and his solution was accepted. He recognizes that there is hope based upon the mercy of God. He calls for the group to make a covenant with God to put away all the pagan wives and any resulting children. The commandment of God to which Shecaniah refers is probably

Deu 7:3-4 *"Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. (4) "For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you.*

As stated earlier, the reason for the order against such intermarriage is spiritual for the women will turn their sons away from following God so they may serve other gods. Ezra understood that God was reestablishing His covenant people in the land He provided for them. Remember all the efforts put forward so that the proper people were brought out of exile as all the genealogies were studied. Also considerable effort was put forward to bring in the needed Levites for the temple. But now Ezra finds that the group is polluted with pagan wives and some children from those pairings. He would have been familiar with Solomon with his foreign wives and the devastating effect this had on Israel (1 Kings 11:1-11; cf. Neh 13:26-27). The family and all the convictions of the new community were at stake. Now we understand why Ezra was so upset at this intermarriage. But the solution would involve separating the pagan wives and any children from the group and that solution is also not appealing to him. We then have to look at the law in regard to this separation.

The Law also gives guidelines for divorce within the community of believers:

Deu 24:1-4 *"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, (2) and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, (3) and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, (4) then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.*

The indecency found in her would be a sexual impropriety like fornication that is sexual interaction before marriage. The certificate of divorce is like our legal separation and not a permanent separation like our meaning of divorce. The Law says that the first husband cannot take back the woman to continue the marriage if she had married again. If the men acted upon the proposal by Shecaniah then the men would all issue this certificate of divorce on the women who would have to take the children from the men. Ezra is the leader so if he approves the proposal then he must lead the men in upholding it. We can look closer at the concept of divorce within God’s community to better understand the problems facing Ezra. God created and defined marriage as stated in Gen. 2:24. Marriage is a picture of God's relationship with His covenant people - an everlasting covenant. Israel's husband and Maker is the LORD, their Redeemer (Isa. 54:5-6). Jehovah is a husband to Israel (Jer. 31:32). The church is the bride of Christ - everlasting, once saved, always saved. Believers are betrothed to one husband- Christ; to be presented pure (2 Cor. 11:1-3). Husbands are to love their wives (1 Cor. 13) as Christ loves the Church to sanctify, nourish, cherish; Jesus gave His life for her and wives are to be subject to their own husbands, as unto the Lord (Eph. 5:22-33). The church is fulfilled at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-10).

God's directions in Scripture concerning marriage directly relate to His relationship with His people. Human marriage is to be a demonstration of God and His covenant people, Israel, and Jesus and the church. Everything that the Bible teaches about marriage, love, responsibilities, faithfulness, adultery, and divorce directly reveal God's standard for His relationship with that standard - especially for those who are His people. We all fail.

We are commanded to be holy for God is holy. On this earth, we cannot attain the perfect standard of holiness of God, but that does not change His holiness. Failure to conform to the standard for marriage given to us by God is NOT unforgiveable. God forgave Israel time after time, and God also forgives us when we fail. But our failure does not change the standard. It is important that we understand the standard so that we can more fully comprehend our covenant relationship with God as the bride of Christ.

God does not break His covenant with His people - ever. Once established, it cannot be broken. Consider what God has to say about divorce. There are many misconceptions concerning divorce, and it is important that we understand what God is saying to us. It is more about our relationship with Him than with our spouse. So what is divorce and what was Moses permitting? Deut. 24, Matt.19:3-9

Two **Hebrew words** are translated divorce. You will note that the definitions are very similar.

#7971 *shalach*  appears 847 times and basically this verb means to send away; to send someone as a

 messenger to a particular place; to send instructions; to let something go freely or without control

#3748  *k’riythuwth* appears 4 times implies the cutting off of a marriage by means of a

 “bill of divorcement” when a man sends his wife out of his house.

Three **Greek words** translated divorce:

#630 *apoluo* appears 69 times to relieve, release, dismiss; put or send away

#647 *apostasion* appears 3 times to defect, to stand off; similar to OT divorce

#863  *aphiemi* appears 146 times to send away, to cause to depart; send forth; to give up a thing

Using these definitions, “divorce” in the Bible is what we would call a **legal separation**. There is no picture of God ever dissolving or canceling His covenants. Have you ever wondered why the OT does not talk about adulterous husbands? Yet, Abraham had three wives, David had nine, and then there is Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-11). While husbands' unfaithfulness is pictured as stealing (David stole Uriah's wife) or evil, specific designation of adultery is about the wife or woman.

So, if “divorce” is a legal separation, how would that affect our understanding of remarriage? When the

Bible addresses problems of broken relationships in a marriage; it pictures how God deals with His covenant people: Unfaithfulness may bring separation; repentance brings restoration. Look at the following verses with this definition in mind:

Matt. 19:3—9 and Mark 10:2—12 God commanded permanence,

 Moses permitted divorce because of their hardness of heart.

 What kind of “hardness of heart” circumstances could justify a married couple separating?

 Moses’ rules are set forth in Deut. 22: 13—19, 28—29, and 24:1—4.

Matt. 5:31—32 . . everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity (fornication),

 makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Luke 16:18 Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery. We read in 1 Cor. 7:10—16 rules for believers married to unbelievers. We read in Malachi 2:16 that God hates divorce. God does not delight in sending his people away from fellowship with Him and He does this only so that He can be reunited with them. The goal of divorce—legal separation—is reconciliation. Remember: What God requires, God enables!

From all of the above we see the drastic measures that the group was taking to remove the sinful status of the people coming from exile. Hopefully some of the pagan wives have already decided to become proper wives by joining their religion as proselytes. We will see later that the number of men found with pagan wives was actually quite small.

**Ezra 10:5-9**

*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) 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. (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.*

Ezra was the leader but he was not going to act alone. He had the leading priests, the Levites, and all Israel take an oath that they would act according to the proposal. Inside the temple complex there were various rooms some of which served as storage rooms and some were occupied by priests. The identification of the people is not known and is stated only to give credit to the accuracy of the time with them. He went there is a total fasting from drinking or eating which is unusual but it shows the extent of his mourning. An oath could be assertive, exculpatory, or promissory. An assertive oath called upon God to witness a statement’s truthfulness. An exculpatory oath had the purpose of clearing someone of an accusation. This oath would have been promissory meaning that it was something to be definitely done at some future time.

All the elders then made the proclamation through all Judah and Jerusalem to the exiles calling them to assemble in Jerusalem. The territory of Judah had been greatly reduced with borders at Bethel in the north, Beersheba in the south, Jericho in the east, and Ono in the west. The most distant place from Jerusalem would be about fifty miles so they could easily make the trip within three days. Not choosing to come would cause the people to lose all their possessions and cause them to be excluded from the assembly of exiles. They would lose all that they had and their identity as members of the people returning from exile and thus lose any protection. This was a harsh penalty and so all the men of Judah and Benjamin came to Jerusalem within the specified time period. The area of Benjamin is just north of Jerusalem and usually not mentioned in this context. The area specified is probably in the open space just before the Water Gate or the Outer Court. The ninth month, Kislev (Nov. – Dec.) is in the middle of the rainy season and it is very cold then so the rain certainly would have contributed to their trembling. However the primary reason for their trembling is their concern for a divine punishment for their sins.



**Ezra 10:10-14**

*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 replied 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."*

Ezra was a scribe and a priest and he stood and announced their sinful charge against them. The word “foreign” can also be translated “pagan” that better emphasizes the import of this act meaning those adhering to a religion other than the worship of Yahweh. Making confession would be similar to that required in a court today when someone must state exactly what he did to deserve the sentence being handed to him (elocution). Israel was called to be a special people to the LORD and so they are also to make that separation from the world including sending away their pagan wives. God so thoroughly convicted the people that they did the unusual act of spontaneously shouting their agreement to the legal charge against them.

A practical person agreed with the charge against them but he pointed out some difficulties in doing the task in just a few days. A suggestion was made that those who had married pagan wives should come at appointed times with the leaders to be the judges for each case. The leaders would be the governing council for the area and they would be familiar with the individuals and their sinful actions. The elders and judges would then gather with those men who had married pagan wives and admit their guilt and make repentance until the fierce anger of God due to their actions in this matter was averted.

**Ezra 10:15-19**

*Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah opposed this, with Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite supporting them. (16) But the exiles did so. And Ezra the priest selected men who were heads of fathers' households for each of their father's households, all of them by name. So they convened on the first day of the tenth month to investigate the matter. (17) They finished investigating all the men who had married foreign wives by the first day of the first month. (18) 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) They pledged to put away their wives, and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their offense.*

Only four men opposed the solution with two Levites supporting their opposition and we are not told their reasons. If Meshullam is the same as in v. 29 then he also had married a pagan woman and this might be a clue that the reason for their objection is to protect their families. They took this situation very seriously as Ezra selected men who were heads of households by name so there would be a record of each man’s decision. They began investigating whether or not each man had violated God’s Law regarding the marrying of pagan women on the first day of the tenth month. They finished their investigations on the first day of the first month so the process took three months. Among those found guilty were some sons of the priests who immediately pledged to put away their wives and to offer a ram for their offense. This sacrifice shows that the sin was one against knowledge for the sacrifice for a sin of ignorance was a goat. Even the sons of Jeshua, the high priest, were guilty. Leven quickly spreads throughout the community of believers and such must be dealt with immediately and effectively.

**Ezra 10:20-44**

*Of the sons of Immer there were Hanani and Zebadiah; (21) and of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel and Uzziah; (22) and of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad and Elasah. (23) Of Levites there were Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (that is, Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah and Eliezer. (24) Of the singers there was Eliashib; and of the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem and Uri. (25) 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: Jehohanan, 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.*

We can obtain the following table by comparing the number of offenders to the numbers of the categories with Zerubbabel (cf. Neh 7):

Category Those who Returned Those who intermarried

Priests 4,289 17

Levites 74 6

Singers 128 1

Gatekeepers 139 3

Laity 24,144 84

Totals 28,774 111

The list of vv. 18-44 reveals 111 men were found guilty of this sin. This seems like a small number when the total number of men involved would have been approximately 30,000. We are not told how many of the pagan wives converted to worship God and so those men would not be guilty of having a pagan wife. Upon completion of this task they would have then restored the community of believers to the status required by God.

Ezra now disappears from the Word of God for about 13 years when he will appear again in the book of Nehemiah where he is again shown to be working for purity within the community of God’s people.