

Ezra 10:1 ¶ Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore.

Ezra 10:2 And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, *one* of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.

Ezra 10:3 Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.

Ezra 10:4 Arise; for *this matter belongeth* unto thee: we also *will be* with thee: be of good courage, and do *it*.

Ezra 10:5 Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they swear.

Continuing the narrative from the previous chapter...

After Ezra had prayed in humility with tears, confessing the sins of the people before God, he was surrounded by a great multitude of the people of Israel who joined him in weeping over their sins. Shechaniah, one of the sons of Elam, spoke out for the people. He declared to Ezra that though they had sinned against God by taking heathen wives, they knew that there was still hope for Israel (if they acted quickly to correct the situation is implied). He suggested that they make a covenant with God to put away all their foreign wives and any children to whom they had given birth. This would bring them back in accordance with the law. He urged the people to stand with him in that commitment. Ezra affirmed that course of action and called for all—priests, Levites and all Israelites—to swear that they would do this in accordance with God’s word. And they did.

I know this was an important step of separation and commitment to God, but I have to admit that part of me empathizes with the abandoned wives and children. It would seem that these women had shown no interest in converting and accepting the God of Israel as their own. It is also obvious that they had encouraged their husbands in sinning against God by accepting their culture instead of choosing to embrace the culture of their husbands.

According to New Testament teaching, the believing spouse is encouraged to stay with the unbelieving spouse in hopes of winning them to Christ.

1 Corinthians 7:10–16 “And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife. But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by

the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?"

The NIV Commentary adds this insight: "All these women and their children' reflects the fact that in ancient societies, as often in ours, mothers were given custody of their children when marriages were dissolved."

Ezra 10:6 ¶ Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and *when* he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away.

Ezra 10:7 And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem;

Ezra 10:8 And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away.

Ezra then rose up and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib and fasted as he mourned for the sin of the people. A proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all that had returned from captivity to gather together in Jerusalem in three days. Anyone that chose not to come would forfeit all he owned and be excommunicated.

Gill notes that Johanan was the great-grandson of Joshua, the high priest.

Ezra 10:9 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 10:10 And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel.

Ezra 10:11 Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives.

All the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered as commanded. Note is made that it was the 20th day of the 9th month (December/January) that the people sat in the street before the temple. They trembled in fear of the seriousness of their situation and because of the great amount of rain that was pouring down. Commentators note that it was the middle of the rainy season.

Ezra stood up before them and once again identified their sin. He then urged them all to confess their sin to the LORD God of Israel and promise to obey Him and separate themselves from the heathen people of the land and their foreign wives.

Ezra 10:12 Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do.

Ezra 10:13 But the people *are* many, and *it is* a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither *is this* a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing.

Ezra 10:14 Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us.

The whole group answered as one that they would do as Ezra had said. The people asked for time to fulfill their promise in light of the rain and all that would be involved in sending the women and children away since so many were involved. They asked that the leaders of the people schedule a time to meet with each one that had taken foreign wives. I would assume this to be to legally affirm a divorce (and I hope provide for the rejected wives and children). They wanted to make sure that they had done all to avert God's wrath against them.

Ezra 10:15 ¶ Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah were employed about this *matter*: and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them.

Most of the translations imply that these four men stood in opposition to the proposal—Jonathan the son of Asahel, Jahaziah the son of Tikvah, Meshullam and Shabbethai, both Levites.

When I looked at the Hebrew, it seemed like they could have been the ones confirming the proposal—e.g., seconding the motion.

Ezra 10:16 And the children of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, *with* certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers, and all of them by *their* names, were separated, and sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter.

Ezra 10:17 And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the first month.

The first part of verse 16 seems to be saying that the people agreed with the four men in affirming Ezra's proposal. Ezra the priest and some of the recognized family leaders gathered by groups apart on the next day to begin implementing the proposal. They completed the process by the 1st day of the 1st month.

Ezra 10:18 And among the sons of the priests there were found that had taken strange wives: *namely*, of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren; Maaseiah, and Eliezer, and Jarib, and Gedaliah.

Ezra 10:19 And they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and *being* guilty, *they offered* a ram of the flock for their trespass.

It seems that four of the priests were identified as guilty of taking foreign wives.

They promised to divorce their wives and offered a ram as a guilt offering for a sin committed in ignorance.

Leviticus 5:17–19 “And if a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the LORD; though he wist it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity. And he shall bring a ram without blemish out of the flock, with thy estimation, for a trespass offering, unto the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his ignorance wherein he erred and wist it not, and it shall be forgiven him. It is a trespass offering: he hath certainly trespassed against the LORD.”

This seems to support my conclusion that the confession of the people resulted from Ezra’s teaching of the law.

The rest of the chapter is comprised of a list of those guilty of taking foreign wives, noting that some also had children.

Ezra 10:20 And of the sons of Immer; Hanani, and Zebadiah.

Ezra 10:21 And of the sons of Harim; Maaseiah, and Elijah, and Shemaiah, and Jehiel, and Uziah.

Ezra 10:22 And of the sons of Pashur; Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethaneel, Jozabad, and Elasah.

Ezra 10:23 Also of the Levites; Jozabad, and Shimei, and Kelaiah, (the same *is* Kelita,) Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

Ezra 10:24 Of the singers also; Eliashib: and of the porters; Shallum, and Telem, and Uri.

Ezra 10:25 Moreover of Israel: of the sons of Parosh; Ramiah, and Jeziah, and Malchiah, and Miamin, and Eleazar, and Malchijah, and Benaiah.

Ezra 10:26 And of the sons of Elam; Mattaniah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, and Abdi, and Jeremoth, and Eliah.

Ezra 10:27 And of the sons of Zattu; Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, and Jeremoth, and Zabad, and Aziza.

Ezra 10:28 Of the sons also of Bebai; Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, *and* Athlai.

Ezra 10:29 And of the sons of Bani; Meshullam, Malluch, and Adaiah, Jashub, and Sheal, and Ramoth.

Ezra 10:30 And of the sons of Pahathmoab; Adna, and Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezaleel, and Binnui, and Manasseh.

Ezra 10:31 And of the sons of Harim; Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchiah, Shemaiah, Shimeon,

Ezra 10:32 Benjamin, Malluch, *and* Shemariah.

Ezra 10:33 Of the sons of Hashum; Mattenai, Mattathah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, *and* Shimei.

Ezra 10:34 Of the sons of Bani; Maadai, Amram, and Uel,

Ezra 10:35 Benaiah, Bedeiah, Chelluh,

Ezra 10:36 Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib,

Ezra 10:37 Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasau,

Ezra 10:38 And Bani, and Binnui, Shimei,

Ezra 10:39 And Shelemiah, and Nathan, and Adaiah,

Ezra 10:40 Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai,

Ezra 10:41 Azareel, and Shelemiah, Shemariah,

Ezra 10:42 Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph.

Ezra 10:43 Of the sons of Nebo; Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jadau, and Joel, Benaiah.

Ezra 10:44 All these had taken strange wives: and *some* of them had wives by whom they had children.

Guzik offers this closing note: "Ezra here disappears from the Biblical record for about thirteen years, when he appears again in the book of Nehemiah. His passion then was the same as it was at the end of the Book of Ezra: to transform the people of God by bringing them the Word of God."