

Ezra

Chapter 10

The People's Confession of Sin

While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites—men, women and children—gathered around him. They too wept bitterly. ² Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra, “We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel. ³ Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and of those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law. ⁴ Rise up; this matter is in your hands. We will support you, so take courage and do it.” ⁵ So Ezra rose up and put the leading priests and Levites and all Israel under oath to do what had been suggested. And they took the oath. ⁶ Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While he was there, he ate no food and drank no water, because he continued to mourn over the unfaithfulness of the exiles. ⁷ A proclamation was then issued throughout Judah and Jerusalem for all the exiles to assemble in Jerusalem. ⁸ Anyone who failed to appear within three days would forfeit all his property, in accordance with the decision of the officials and elders, and would himself be expelled from the assembly of the exiles. ⁹ Within the three days, all the men of Judah and Benjamin had gathered in Jerusalem. And on the twentieth day of the ninth month, all the people were sitting in the square before the house of God, greatly distressed by the occasion and because of the rain. ¹⁰ Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “You have been unfaithful; you have married foreign women, adding to Israel’s guilt. ¹¹ Now make confession to the LORD, the God of your fathers, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives.” ¹² The whole assembly responded with a loud voice: “You are right! We must do as you say. ¹³ But there are many people here and it is the rainy season; so we cannot stand outside. Besides, this matter cannot be taken care of in a day or two, because we have sinned greatly in this thing. ¹⁴ Let our officials act for the whole assembly. Then let everyone in our towns who has married a foreign woman come at a set time, along with the elders and judges of each town, until the fierce anger of our God in this matter is turned away from us.” ¹⁵ Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah, supported by Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite, opposed this. ¹⁶ So the exiles did as was proposed. Ezra the priest selected men who were family heads, one from each family division, and all of them designated by name. On the first day of the tenth month they sat down to investigate the cases, ¹⁷ and by the

first day of the first month they finished dealing with all the men who had married foreign women.

Ch 10 Ezra's actions are now described in the third person, unlike "Ezra's memoirs" (7:27–9:15), which were in the first person

10:1 Ezra, surrounded by weeping people, had fallen to his knees (9:5) in the courtyard of the temple. This would also be the place where all the people later assembled (10:9).

weeping. Not silently but out loud (see 3:13 and note; Ne 1:4; Joel 2:12). (CSB)

throwing himself down. The prophets and other leaders used object lessons, even bizarre actions, to attract people's attention (Isa 7:3; 8:1–4, 18; Jer 13:1–11; 19; 27:2–12; Eze 4:1–5:4). (CSB)

THEY TOO WEPT BITTERLY – They were deeply affected at the thought of God's displeasure, which they justly feared was about to light upon them, because of their transgressions. (ACC)

10:2 Ezra, as a wise teacher, waited for his audience to draw their own conclusions about what should be done. (CSB)

Shecaniah. Perhaps his father Jehiel is the Jehiel mentioned in v. 26 since he was also of the family of Elam. If so, Shecaniah was doubtless grieved that his father had married a non-Jewish woman. Six members of the clan of Elam were involved in intermarriage (v. 26). (CSB)

Family of Elam was mentioned in 2:7 and 8:7, but not Shecaniah. Six sons of Elam were among those who married foreign wives (10:26). (TLSB)

It must have been a great comfort to Ezra to know he did not stand alone. Even a man as staunch as the prophet Elijah lost heart when he thought that he stood alone against the idolatry of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 19). Pastors, teachers and other leaders called by God need the encouragement of fellow Christians when they face the difficult and often unpopular task of rebuking or disciplining the impenitent. (PBC)

there is hope. The Lord promised to forgive the sins of those who repent (Dt 30:1–10). (TLSB)

10:3 *make a covenant.* Lit. "cut a covenant" (see note on Ge 15:18). (CSB)

Marriage itself was regarded as a covenant. (TLSB)

women and their children. Mothers were given custody of their children when marriages were dissolved. When Hagar was dismissed, Ishmael was sent with her (Ge 21:14). In Babylonia divorced women were granted their children and had to wait for them to grow up before remarrying, according to the law code of Hammurapi (see chart on “Ancient Texts Relating to the OT”). In Greece, however, children from broken homes remained with their fathers. (CSB)

to put away all these wives. Shecaniah’s harsh proposal to stop the problem immediately. In contrast with most divorce situations today, these marriages were illegal from the start. Hos 2:4. (TLSB)

counsel of my lord. This course of action had likely been advised by Ezra.(TLSB)

tremble. Action had the support of those who truly wished to follow God’s Law (9:4). (TLSB)

according to the Law. Before Israel entered Canaan, a land populated by various foreign nations, God told His people: “You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons” (Dt 7:3). For an Israelite to enter such a union was illegal in God’s sight and needed to be remedied. NT believers are under no such obligation or command to divorce an unbelieving spouse. (TLSB)

10:4 *Rise up.* Cf. David’s exhortation (1Ch 22:16). (CSB)

10:5 Though Ezra was himself a priest, it seems that his main support came from laypeople, making it esp important for him to get the leading clergy to accept the covenant (v 3). (TLSB)

oath. The implied curse attendant upon nonfulfillment of a Biblical oath is often expressed in the vague statement, “May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if” (see note on 1Sa 3:17). On rare occasions the full implications of the curse are spelled out (Nu 5:19–22; Job 31; Ps 7:4–5; 137:5–6). (CSB)

10:6 *withdrew.* Ezra needed to prepare himself for the solemn assembly that would deal with the marriage problem. (TLSB)

Jehohanan. Common name; he is not further identified. (TLSB)

room. Such temple chambers were used as storerooms (8:29; Ne 13:4–5). (CSB)

ate no food and drank no water. Complete fasting from both food and drink was rare. Moses did it twice (Ex 34:28; Dt 9:18), and the Ninevites also did it (Jnh 3:7). Ordinarily, fasting involved abstaining only from eating (1Sa 1:7; 2Sa 3:35). (CSB)

mourn. The Hebrew for this word often describes the reaction of those aware of the threat of deserved judgment (Ex 33:4; Nu 14:39). (CSB)

10:7–8 While Ezra continued to fast and pray, the officials and elders ordered all the exiles to assemble in Jerusalem. Although Ezra had been invested with great authority (7:25–26), he used it sparingly and influenced the people by his example. (CSB)

10:7 *proclamation.* King Artaxerxes had authorized Ezra to make sure that God’s Law was enforced in Judah (7:25–26). (TLSB)

10:8 Those who failed to attend the assembly scheduled on the third day in Jerusalem would find themselves ostracized from the community, even losing their property. (TLSB)

within three days. Since the territory of Judah had been much reduced, the most distant people would not be more than 50 miles from Jerusalem. The borders were Bethel in the north, Beersheba in the south, Jericho in the east and Ono in the west (cf. Ne 7:26–38; 11:25–35). (CSB)

forfeit. The Hebrew for this word means “to ban from profane use and to devote to the Lord,” either by destruction (see Ex 22:20; Dt 13:12–18 and NIV text notes) or by giving it to the Lord’s treasury (cf. Lev 27:28; Jos 6:19; 7:1–15). (CSB)

10:9, 16–17 See chart on “Chronology: Ezra-Nehemiah”. (CSB)

10:9 *Judah and Benjamin.* See note on 1:5. (CSB)

ninth month. Our Dec, four months after Ezra had returned (7:8). (TLSB)

square. Either the outer court of the temple or the open space before the Water Gate (Ne 8:1). (CSB)

rain. The Hebrew for this word is a plural of intensity, indicating heavy torrential rains. The ninth month, Kislev (November-December), is in the middle of the “rainy season” (v. 13), which begins with light showers in October and lasts to mid-April. December and January are also cold months, with temperatures in the 50s and even 40s in Jerusalem. The people shivered not only because they were drenched, but perhaps also because they sensed divine displeasure in the heavy rains (see 1Sa 12:17–18; Eze 13:11, 13). (CSB)

Ninth month normally was “a time of heavy rain” (v 13), when the weather was cold and miserable. (TLSB)

10:10–11 Ezra addressed the crowd, identifying the sin and calling for repentance and its fruit. (TLSB)

10:10 *adding to Israel's guilt.* See Ex 9:34; Jdg 3:12; 4:1; 2Ch 28:13. The sins and failures of the exiles were great enough, but they added insult to injury by marrying pagan women. (CSB)

10:11 *Separate yourselves.* See Nu 16:21; 2Co 6:14. (CSB)

Ezra's action of dissolving these mixed marriages was more comparable to telling someone to stop living in an adulterous relationship which was wrong from the start than to forcing some to dissolve a valid marriage. (PBC)

10:12–13 Assembly's suggestion that action be delayed and a commission appointed was reasonable. The large crowd, inclement weather, and seriousness of the problem made immediate action unwise. (TLSB)

10:12 *with a loud voice.* See Ne 9:4. (CSB)

WE MUST DO AS YOU SAY – They all resolved to do what Ezra then commanded, they did put away their wives, even those by whom they had children; Ezra 10:44: this was a great hardship on the women and children. Though by the Jewish laws such marriages were null and void, yet as the women they had taken did not know these laws, their case was deplorable. However, we may take it for granted that each of them received a portion according to the circumstances of their husbands, and that they and their children were not turned away desolate, but had such a provision as their necessities required. Humanity must have dictated this, and no law of God is contrary to humanity. After all, there is some room to doubt whether they did put them finally away, for several years after Nehemiah found Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab; Nehemiah 13:23. And if these were not the same women, we find that the same offense was continued. (ACC)

The blame for the tragic side effects of this action belong to those who had created the situation by ignoring God's law. Today, too, people who ignore God's standards for faithfulness in marriage often cause pain to their spouses and innocent children. (PBC)

10:14 *officials.* Perhaps the same officials who had originally brought this matter to Ezra's attention (9:1). (TLSB)

elders and judges of each town. See Dt 16:18; 19:12; 21:3, 19; Ru 4:2. (CSB)

No doubt to give evidence to the officials based on local information and to protect the rights of the innocent. (TLSB)

fierce wrath. Ezra had confessed that a just God had every reason to consume the ungrateful remnant, leaving none to escape (9:14). The assembly wanted to avert such a disaster. (TLSB)

10:15 Perhaps these four men opposed the measure because they wanted to protect themselves or their relatives, or they may have viewed it as being too harsh. (CSB)

Unclear whether these four men opposed the proposed procedure or any delay in taking action. (TLSB)

Jahzeiah. Means “May the LORD see” (the name is found only here). (CSB)

Tikvah. Means “hope” (found elsewhere only in 2Ki 22:14). (CSB)

Meshullam. See note on 8:16. If he is the Meshullam of v. 29, he himself had married a pagan wife. (CSB)

Men with the same name are mentioned in 8:16; 10:29. (TLSB)

Shabbethai. Occurs only here and in Ne 8:7; 11:16; perhaps means “one born on the Sabbath.” (CSB)

10:16–17 The committee completed its work in three months, discovering that about 110 men were guilty of marrying pagan wives. (CSB)

The commission took three months to examine the situation of intermarriages. (TLSB)

10:16 *heads of fathers’ houses.* It is not clear whether these men appointed by Ezra are the “officials” suggested by the assembly (v 14). (TLSB)

10:1–17 To resolve the problem of illegal marriages, some Judeans make a harsh proposal for immediate divorces, but the counsel of the community wisely requests investigation so they can learn the extent of the problem and propose the best solution. Have confidence in the wisdom of God’s people, as informed by God’s Word. Call for their counsel, and listen patiently. Above all, God’s Word must prevail in the congregation’s worship and, thereby, its decisions. At all times, we may confess our sins and receive God’s Word of absolution, by which He constantly blesses us with mercy. • Have mercy on us, O Lord, and lead us by Your Law and Gospel. Amen. (TLSB)

Those Guilty of Intermarriage

¹⁸ Among the descendants of the priests, the following had married foreign women: From the descendants of Jeshua son of Jozadak, and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib and Gedaliah. ¹⁹ (They all gave their hands in pledge to put away their wives, and for their guilt they each presented a

ram from the flock as a guilt offering.)²⁰ From the descendants of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah.²¹ From the descendants of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel and Uziah.²² From the descendants of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad and Elasah.²³ Among the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (that is, Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah and Eliezer.²⁴ From the singers: Eliashib. From the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem and Uri.²⁵ And among the other Israelites: From the descendants of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malkijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malkijah and Benaiah.²⁶ From the descendants of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth and Elijah.²⁷ From the descendants of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad and Aziza.²⁸ From the descendants of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai and Athlai.²⁹ From the descendants of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal and Jeremoth.³⁰ From the descendants of Pahath-Moab: Adna, Kelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui and Manasseh.³¹ From the descendants of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon,³² Benjamin, Malluch and Shemariah.³³ From the descendants of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh and Shimei.³⁴ From the descendants of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel,³⁵ Benaiah, Bedeiah, Keluhi,³⁶ Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib,³⁷ Mattaniah, Mattenai and Jaasu.³⁸ From the descendants of Binnui: ^a Shimei,³⁹ Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah,⁴⁰ Macnadebai, Shashai, Sharai,⁴¹ Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah,⁴² Shallum, Amariah and Joseph.⁴³ From the descendants of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel and Benaiah.⁴⁴ All these had married foreign women, and some of them had children by these wives.

10:18–43 This list of men who had married foreign women was meant to emphasize the seriousness of their sin. Names are grouped according to the customary classification (ch 2; 8:1–14): 17 priests, 6 Levites, 1 singer, 3 gatekeepers, and 84 sons of Israel or laymen for a total of 111. Compared to the total population, this number may not appear alarming. However, the danger of assimilation by the peoples of the land was very real in view of the fact that the clergy, officials, and chief men were “foremost” (9:2). When “the sons of Jeshua,” high priest in Zerubbabel’s day (5:2; 10:18), set the fashion, the whole populace was tempted to follow their example. (TLSB)

10:18–22 See 2:36–39. (CSB)

10:19 *gave their hands.* For the symbolic use of the handshake see 2Ki 10:15; Eze 17:18. (CSB)

ram. Guilt offerings were to be made for sins committed unintentionally (Lev 5:14–19) as well as intentionally (Lev 6:1–7), and a ram was the appropriate offering in either case (Lev 5:15; 6:6). (CSB)

Prescribed for someone who “commits a breach of faith and sins unintentionally in any of the holy things of the LORD” (Lv 5:15). (TLSB)

10:24 It is striking that only one singer and three gatekeepers were involved. No temple servants (2:43–54) or descendants of Solomon’s servants (2:55–57) sinned through intermarriage. (CSB)

10:25–43 See 2:3–20. (CSB)

the sons of. Many of the 11 family names appeared in ch 2 and 8:1–14. (TLSB)

10:29 *Bani.* Also appears in v 34. There may have been two men with the same name or it may have been a mistake in copying (perhaps should be Bigvai, as in 2:14; 8:14). (TLSB)

10:30 *Bezalel.* Cf. Ex 31:2. (CSB)

10:31 *Shimeon.* The Hebrew for this name is the same as that for Simeon, Jacob’s second son (see NIV text note on Ge 29:33). In Greek the name became Simon. (CSB)

10:43 *Nebo.* The Hebrew equivalent of the name of the Babylonian god Nabu (see Isa 46:1); found only here as a personal name. (CSB)

10:44 Some of the marriages had produced children, but this was not accepted as a reason for halting the divorce proceedings. See NIV text note. (They sent them away with their children.) (CSB)

All these had married foreign women. Sentence hearkens back to v 17, illustrating a literary device in which the Hbr forms a unit of thought (*inclusio*). (TLSB)

some of the women had even borne children. The Hbr text lacks clarity. This may have been a reminder that the separation that took place disrupted family ties and must have caused grief and hardships. (Today, convicted criminals who serve time in prison inflict similar disgrace and suffering on their families.) The Judeans likely provided some measure of support so that innocent victims of the reform were not left to fend for themselves. See note, Gn 34:12. God often commanded Israel to care for the needy (e.g., Dt 10:18–19; 24:17–18). (TLSB)

10:18–44 As a result of the earlier investigation, 111 illegal marriages are identified and ended. These circumstances teach us about the gravity of God’s Law, of marriage, and of vows. Enter into such matters thoughtfully and informed by God’s Word. The Lord Himself has vowed to guide and care for your family and to save you through the life of His Son, Jesus. • Lord, lead me to understand and keep my vows and to bring honor to my family and to Your name. Amen. (TLSB)