

Ezra

Chapter 10

The People Confess Their Sin

While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children, gathered to him out of Israel, for the people wept bitterly. 2 And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, addressed Ezra: “We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. 3 Therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the Law. 4 Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it.” 5 Then Ezra arose and made the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take an oath that they would do as had been said. So they took the oath. 6 Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib, where he spent the night, neither eating bread nor drinking water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles. 7 And a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, 8 and that if anyone did not come within three days, by order of the officials and the elders all his property should be forfeited, and he himself banned from the congregation of the exiles. 9 Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month. And all the people sat in the open square before the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of the heavy rain. 10 And Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “You have broken faith and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel. 11 Now then make confession to the LORD, the God of your fathers and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.” 12 Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, “It is so; we must do as you have said. 13 But the people are many, and it is a time of heavy rain; we cannot stand in the open. Nor is this a task for one day or for two, for we have greatly transgressed in this matter. 14 Let our officials stand for the whole assembly. Let all in our cities who have taken foreign wives come at appointed times, and with them the elders and judges of every city, until the fierce wrath of our God over this matter is turned away from us.” 15 Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite supported them. 16 Then the returned exiles did so. Ezra the priest selected men, heads of fathers' houses, according to their fathers' houses, each of them designated by name. On the first day of the tenth month they sat down to examine the matter; 17 and by the first day of the first month they had come to the end of all the men who had married foreign women.

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). (CSB)

weeping. Not silently but out loud. (CSB)

casting 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)

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.” (CSB)

Marriage itself was regarded as a covenant. (TLSB)

wives 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)

10:5 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)

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

neither eating bread nor drinking 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)

mourning. 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)

forfeited. 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) or by giving it to the Lord’s treasury (cf. Lev 27:28; Jos 6:19; 7:1–15). (CSB)

10:9 *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 *increased the guilt of Israel.* 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)

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 every city. 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 Now there were found some of the sons of the priests who had married foreign women: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah, some of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers. **19** They pledged themselves to put away their wives, and their guilt offering was a ram of the flock for their guilt. **20** Of the sons of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah. **21** Of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah. **22** Of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasa. **23** Of the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (that is, Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. **24** Of the singers: Eliashib. Of the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri. **25** And of Israel: of the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malchijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Hashabiah, and Benaiah. **26** Of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah. **27** Of the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza. **28** Of the sons of Bebai were Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai. **29** Of the sons of Bani were Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth. **30** Of the sons of Pahath-moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh. **31** 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** Of the sons of 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: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah. **44** All these had married foreign women, and some of the women had even borne children.

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)

10:19 *pledged themselves*. 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)

10:29 *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. 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. 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)