

The Book of Ezra

Chapters 9-10

November 3, 2019

Chapter 9 – The people have taken foreign wives; Ezra prays

Ezra has arrived in Jerusalem with a second wave of returning exiles. Now Ezra learns that many of the Jews have married non-Jewish women. Ezra is devastated and prays.

In chapter 10 we learn that many have children as well. While this group of exiles may be guilty, the first group is involved as well. For example, in chapter 10 we learn that sons of Jeshua are guilty—Jeshua is the priest mentioned throughout chapters 1-6 (decades earlier).

Background – why this is a sin

Deuteronomy 7:1-6, “...You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. ...For you are a people holy to the LORD your God...” (ESV)

The context of “them” is the Canaanites, the people that the Israelites were about to conquer. It does not seem limited to that, though.

The principle here is not about nationality or ethnic background per se. It’s about faithfulness to God. We see approved examples of foreign women converting to Judaism before marriage.

Rahab was a foreign woman (**Joshua 2**). But she is mentioned in **Hebrews 11:31** as a hero of faith. She married a Jew—specifically the father of Boaz, who married Ruth (**Matthew 1:5**). Ruth herself is from Moab (**Ruth 1:4**), but she converted to Judaism (**Ruth 1:16**) before marrying Boaz.

What happens if someone does intermarry?

En masse, the promise is destruction by the hand of God, hence Ezra’s distress.

But if they live, we do not see any instruction on what to do. The people are living in sin, but now what?

Some points from Ezra 9

- Verse 1 – Guilty are, “The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites” (ESV)
- Verse 2 – Echoing Deuteronomy 7, “the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands”
- Verse 3 – Ezra is stunned

- Verses 11-12 – Ezra cites “the prophets.” The words are not a single direct quote but a combination of a few scriptures (especially Deuteronomy 7)
- Verse 14 – “Would you not be angry with us until you consumed us, so that there should be no remnant...?” Like Moses’ plea. Yes, these people blew it as soon as they were delivered from captivity, but please don’t destroy them all, even if that’s what is due.

Chapter 10 – To fix the situation, the people put away the foreign wives and children

The solution is for the men to divorce the foreign women and even to put away children born to them. There is no recorded prophecy here; it seems that the people have discerned this solution on their own, but verse 11 indicates that it is God’s will.

Verse 1

- People came up “While Ezra prayed” (ESV). Presumably the prayer was loud and his words convicted some.
- It was “a very great assembly” (ESV)

Verse 3

- The plan. A “covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them” (KJV)
 - Including children
- Done “according to the counsel of my lord”
 - This is from KJV, NASB, ESV, and maybe others are the same
 - Some argue it should be “the counsel of the Lord.” But I’d agree with (all of) the translators, that they mean Ezra.
- “let it be done according to the Law” (ESV)
 - Even if this exact scenario is not spelled out

Verse 4

- Shecaniah says to Ezra, “*this* matter is your responsibility” (NASB)
- Someone has to lead

Verses 7-8

- This is a national sin, and “all the returned exiles” (v.7, ESV) are required to be present

Verse 9

- Trembling for two reasons. Echoes Ezra 3:11-12, weeping for two reasons

Verses 13-17

- The problem was so widespread, it had to be dealt with systematically over 3 months

Application to us today

What is right and wrong today?

We do not live under the old covenant (**Hebrews 8:13**). The instructions of Deuteronomy do not command us today. But these scriptures do instruct us still (**Romans 15:4**) to show us principles of God's nature.

Today, it is not a sin to be married to a non-Christian, but it is a sin to divorce for that reason.

- **1 Corinthians 7:12-14**, "If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him" (v. 13, ESV)

It is wrong to divorce for any reason.

- **Matthew 5:32**
- **Matthew 19:3-6**
- **Mark 10:2-9**
- **Romans 7:3**
- **1 Corinthians 7:10-11**

It is wrong to marry a divorced person.

- **Matthew 5:32**
- **Matthew 19:9**
- **Mark 10:11-12**

What if divorce happens in an unscriptural way anyway?

What if a woman did marry a man that was divorced for “any cause”? Yes, she sinned, but what now? What if it has been 10 or 20 years and they have children together, living with them, and they love each other and are kind and generous people? Is it enough to simply repent in words only? Surely, they shouldn’t break up that wonderful family? Or should they?

The important things to consider are

- What is God pleased with?
- What is true repentance?
- What will keep us from heaven?

Repentance demands actions. Faith without works is dead (**James 2:14-26**). “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (**Matthew 3:8**, ESV).

- Imagine you steal someone’s watch. They see you wearing it and call you out. You admit it and say you are sorry. Then you keep wearing the watch. Have you repented? Are you truly sorry?
- In **1 Corinthians 5:1-5**, the apostle Paul rails against the church for tolerating that “a man has his father's wife” (ESV). Imagine if the church wrote back to Paul to say, “*He is still living with someone else’s wife, but he said he is sorry. We have him teaching Bible class now.*” How would that go over with Paul? With God?
- John the Baptist was imprisoned (and likely killed) because of telling king Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife” (**Mark 6:18**, ESV).

It is clear how wrong the situation is in 1 Corinthians 5. It is clear that action is required for anything remotely resembling repentance.

But what if it is someone in your congregation who remarried after divorcing? What if the divorce was because of “irreconcilable differences”? What if the ex-husband was abusive? Now we see shades of gray, but should we?

I would say that marriages like this—marriages that are sinful in their very nature—should be ended in civil divorce. If someone desires to be saved and is in this situation, we should expect this kind of repentance before baptizing him. If someone committed this sin after being saved, he should repent as well. How guilty would we be if we pretend someone is saved when he is not?

We have no command of this nature, but neither did the Jews. But the principle is the same. Marriages that are, in and of themselves, sinful cannot rightfully continue.