



Studies in Ezra & Nehemiah

Text

Ezra 10:1-44

Topic

The Israelites who married pagan women  
are told that they must divorce them

Title

*"The Worst Wives Club"*

If he were ministering today, I think the apostle Paul would have been comfortable quoting from movies and television.

He often quoted from popular literature. When preaching the Gospel to the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill, Paul said, "for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children'" (Acts 17:28).

The first part of that comes from *Cretica* by Epimenides, and the second part from *Hymn to Zeus*, written by the Sicilian poet Aratus. They were directed at Zeus in Greek literature, but Paul applied them to the Creator.

- Paul uses at least six such secular quotes on Mars Hill.
- There are at least twenty-one secular quotes scattered in Paul's epistles. My favorite: Again quoting Epimenides, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons" (Titus 1:12). (Note in passing that Epimenides was a Cretan).

Not too many people are reading Epimenides, but they are going to see *Captain Marvel*.

Some memorable quotes come from *The Untouchables*. One in particular is useful for our reading of Ezra chapter ten. Jim Malone is a tough Irish beat cop played by the very Scottish-sounding Sean Connery.

(It's not as weird as his Scottish accent in *The Hunt for Red October*, in which Connery played a Russian sub commander).

Malone asked Elliot Ness, “What are you prepared to do?” Then he laid it out for him:

You wanna get Capone? Here's how you get him. He pulls a knife, you pull a gun. He sends one of yours to the hospital, you send one of his to the morgue! *That's the Chicago way, and that's how you get Capone!* Now, do you want to do that? **Are you ready to do that?**

Ness and his squad would need to make a total commitment to their task. Each of the men involved would need to ask themselves, “**Am I ready to do that?**”

The Israelites had an “Am I ready to do that?” moment in our text. Those who sinned by marrying foreigners were told that they must divorce their Gentile spouses. Total commitment to God demanded it.

When **we** encounter God’s living Word, it asks us for a total commitment to whatever task is being addressed. We should ask, rhetorically, “Am I ready to do that?”

I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 Be Ready To Renew Your Commitment To Jesus, and #2 Be Ready To Resume Your Commitment To Jesus.

## #1 Be Ready To Renew Your Commitment To Jesus

(v1-6)

Let me say this to avoid confusion: **This chapter does not address the subject of divorce and remarriage.** The divorcing of these Gentile wives was a unique situation. No precedent is set here - even for Israel.

A little later on in the Second Temple story, Nehemiah will encounter this same problem. He does not apply Ezra's dissolution solution; Nehemiah acts only to stop any future intermarriages from occurring.

In the Church Age in which we live, believers can find themselves married to nonbelievers. In Corinth, the believers, some at least, thought they should divorce their spouses.

Paul addressed this for them and for all subsequent believers in First Corinthians chapter seven. He said, “If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him... If the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such *cases*” (v12-13&15).

That’s the law of love we are to obey. Ezra ten is not a marriage study, and should not be referenced in marriage studies.

Ezr 10:1 Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly.

Ezra had been informed that there were those in Israel who had intermarried with foreign women.

Besides being prohibited by the Law of Moses, it would lead Israel into idolatry as they mixed the worship of foreign gods with the worship of Jehovah.

Ezra tore his clothes, pulled out his hair, and prayed for the nation. A large group assembled with him, showing their support with tears.

In the Book of Romans, we are told to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to weep with those who weep (12:15). When someone is grieving, tears are better than talk. Be present in grief and only suggest answers if asked; even then, tread lightly.

Ezr 10:2 And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, *one* of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, "We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this.

One man spoke up. He seems to have a supernatural word of wisdom.

Even though the Holy Spirit did not permanently indwell Old Testament believers, He was active in bestowing gifts upon them, and this was wisdom from Him on how to address the situation.

The “hope” Shechaniah trusted in was a recognition of God’s grace and mercy. He had not yet acted in discipline against His disobedient people. His longsuffering waited for them to repent and thereby renew their commitment to Him.

Ezr 10:3 Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.

“Put away” is the word for *divorce*.

In the Book of Deuteronomy, it is used of divorcing your wife and giving her a Certificate of Divorce that indicated she had not been unfaithful, and had done nothing wrong.

These “wives” and children would not have any stigma attached to them. Still, this was radical, and divorce is always devastating on families. How could this be right, since God hates divorce?

This isn't necessarily the reason why, but let me point out something. Intermarriage to foreigners put the nation in jeopardy of extinction. Think of what that might mean: No line through which the Messiah could be born to be the Savior of the world. The stakes were high indeed.

Ezr 10:4 *Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it.*"

It fell to Ezra to make things right.



It helped tremendously that Israel was with him, but it was his responsibility to put things in motion, and to see them through.

I'll develop this point in a minute, but note that, if you are in Christ, you, too, have certain responsibilities to minister to folks, depending upon your relationships.

Ezr 10:5 Then Ezra arose, and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So they swore an oath.

It's OK to swear on the Bible in court. It's OK to exchange wedding vows. We're not oath-free. Jesus warned about swearing foolish oaths.

Ezr 10:6 Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and *when* he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity.

Did Ezra go on a total fast? It might be better to say that he had no appetite on account of his grief.

Ezra is shaping-up to be one of the great grievers in the Bible. In chapter nine, he tore out his own hair - unique among Bible grievers. His withdrawal and loss of appetite are consistent.

If you watch any true-crime shows, like *48 Hours*, there's always the detective who comments, "The husband wasn't grieving like you'd expect," thus making him the prime suspect.

What *is* normal when it comes to grief? If Ezra is our standard - **we're all guilty of failing in our passion for God.**

**Renew** the commitment. That's what Sheconiah suggested.

Renew... Rededicate... Return... Call it what you will. It is the realization that you are not walking in obedience to God.

You may not be walking in sin. It could be that you have drifted, or become a little dull of hearing.

Get with God - just you and He. Talk to Him about your relationship with Him, and its passion, or lack thereof.

## #2 Be Ready To Resume Your Commitment To Jesus

(v7-44)

A few years ago there was a teaching going around that said of Jesus, "If He's not Lord of all, He's not Lord at all."

Hey - Even the guys teaching that cannot claim 100% lordship of Jesus in their lives without lying.

We tend to think of total commitment in terms of Jesus' comments to the rich young ruler. Jesus told that young seeker, "Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven; and come, follow Me" (Luke 18:22).

It doesn't help that the Christian books on this subject play on this fear that we are falling short. To recover we are told to follow the author's program - especially by buying videos and merchandise that relates to his book.

Let's look at another New Testament story about total commitment. Jesus encountered the man possessed by a legion of demons. The Lord cast them out, restoring the demoniac. The man "begged [Jesus] that he might be with Him" (Luke 8:38).

The Lord said, "Return to your own house, and tell what great things God has done for you." And he went his way and proclaimed throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him" (8:39).

## **Jesus sent him home to work-out his commitment.**

While American Christianity can easily be criticized for its shallowness and love of comfort, I think most of the time Jesus sends you back home - or back to work, or back to school, or back into your community.

So let's read on excitedly rather than defeatedly.

Ezr 10:7 And they issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the descendants of the captivity, that they must gather at Jerusalem,

Ezr 10:8 and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the instructions of the leaders and elders, all his property would be confiscated, and he himself would be separated from the assembly of those from the captivity.

Israel was meant to be a theocracy. The term was initially coined by The historian Josephus in the first century AD to describe the government of the Jews. Josephus argued that while mankind had developed many forms of rule, most fell under the following three types: monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy. The government of the Jews, however, was unique. Josephus offered the term "theocracy" to describe this rule, ordained by Moses, in which God is sovereign and His word is law.

Ezr 10:9 So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth of the month; and all the people sat in the open square of the house of God, trembling because of *this* matter and because of heavy rain.

Ezr 10:10 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel.

Ezr 10:11 Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives."

Fifteen seconds. That's how long it took me to read aloud Ezra's message in verses ten and eleven. *Talk about a short sermon.* Most of the time you can say more by saying less.

Ezr 10:12 Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, "Yes! As you have said, so we must do.

Ezr 10:13 But *there are* many people; *it is* the season for heavy rain, and we are not able to stand outside. Nor *is this* the work of one or two days, for *there are* many of us who have transgressed in this matter.

Ezr 10:14 Please, let the leaders of our entire assembly stand; and let all those in our cities who have taken pagan wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and judges of their cities, until the fierce wrath of our God is turned away from us in this matter."

It seems that Ezra wanted to deal with the transgressors right then. It was impractical.

Ministry need not be purposely impractical. We shouldn't create unnecessary obstacles for people.

Ezr 10:15 Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite gave them support.

These guys might have opposed the divorce solution. At least one of them, Meshullam, is listed later as being a transgressor. More likely they opposed the waiting, and like folks in Riverdale, wanted to git 'er done.

Ezr 10:16 Then the descendants of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, *with* certain heads of the fathers' *households*, were set apart by the fathers' *households*, each of them by name; and they sat down on the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter.

Ezr 10:17 By the first day of the first month they finished *questioning* all the men who had taken pagan wives.



I love it when a plan comes together. It began eleven days after this assembly, and took three months to complete. Good thing they didn't try to do it in one day, during a cold rainstorm.

Even though it would be obvious you were guilty, each case was heard individually so there would be no prejudice.

Nothing is said about what happened to the divorced wives, but as I suggested earlier, the language can indicate they were given Certificates of Divorce that eliminated any stigma. They had done nothing wrong.

It is also interesting to note that nothing is said about any conversions to Judaism. Were there some, that might have saved the family? If not, it shows just how pagan these individuals were.

There are a ton of potential baby (or pet) names for you to consider from here through verse forty-three. I'm not going to even try.

I do want to point out that the number of those guilty of intermarriage turned out to be relatively few - 113, I think.

All that fuss over about a hundred people? Yeah - because a little leaven leavens the whole lump. Especially since many of those involved were leaders.

In Christ we ought to be intolerant of sin in our midst. Certainly we ought to decry sin in general, and preach righteousness to society. But judgment should begin in the house of God.

Example: For decades, the church has rightfully decried homosexuality. Sadly, sexual sins among heterosexuals, like fornication adultery, are almost commonplace. Sin is sin.

Skip to verse forty-four...

Ezr 10:18 And among the sons of the priests who had taken pagan wives *the following* were

found of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah.

Ezr 10:19 And they gave their promise that they would put away their wives; and *being* guilty, *they presented* a ram of the flock as their trespass offering.

Ezr 10:20 Also of the sons of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah;

Ezr 10:21 of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah;

Ezr 10:22 of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah.

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

Ezr 10:24 Also of the singers: Eliashib; and of the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

Ezr 10:25 And others of Israel: of the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, Jeziah, Malchiah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malchijah, and Benaiah;

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

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

Ezr 10:28 of the sons of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, *and* Athlai;

Ezr 10:29 of the sons of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, *and* Ramoth;

Ezr 10:30 of the sons of Pahath-Moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh;

Ezr 10:31 of the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon,

Ezr 10:32 Benjamin, Malluch, *and* Shemariah;

Ezr 10:33 of the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, *and* Shimei;

Ezr 10:34 of the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel,


Ezr 10:35 Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluh,

Ezr 10:36 Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib,

Ezr 10:37 Mattaniah, Mattenai, Jaasai,

Ezr 10:38 Bani, Binnui, Shimei,

Ezr 10:39 Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah,  
Ezr 10:40 Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai,  
Ezr 10:41 Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah,  
Ezr 10:42 Shallum, Amariah, *and* Joseph;  
Ezr 10:43 of the sons of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah,  
Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, *and* Benaiah.

 Ezr 10:44 All these had taken pagan wives,  
and *some* of them had wives *by whom* they had  
children.

Totally abrupt ending. It punctuates their  
commitment.

**Earlier** we contrasted the rich young ruler  
and the demoniac of the Gadarenes.

One day, you might have a rich young ruler  
experience. Jesus may call upon you to go way  
beyond your normal living sacrifice. He may call  
upon you to be truly radical. **“Are you ready to  
do that?”**

Everyday Jesus is calling upon you to be a living sacrifice. In all your walks of life, you are to walk as Jesus walked and be His disciple. **“Are you ready to do that?”**

Here is a scenario to consider as an example:

1Co 7:32 ... He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord - how he may please the Lord.

1Co 7:33 But he who is married cares about the things of the world - how he may please *his* wife.

Paul didn't mean it was wrong, or sinful, to get married. After all, some of the finest biblical teaching on marriage came through him.

Paul encouraged remaining single because if you choose marriage, it has certain biblical responsibilities.

Jesus may not - in fact, He's probably not - called you to remain single, sell everything, and go full-missionary.

He has called you to go home and love your wife as Jesus loves you; to submit to your husband as unto the Lord; to obey your parents; Etc., etc.

- You DON'T have to go to the ends of the earth.
- You DO need to be a disciple where you are scattered.

You can do all things through Christ. **“Are you ready to do that?”**

Then, “return to your own house [or church or job or school] and tell what great things God has done for you.”