

Restoration of Exiles: The Book of Ezra Chapter 10

Idea for a solution (read vv. 1-4)

A large crowd gathers around Ezra as he weeps and confesses and prays. His example touched them, and they too wept bitterly. This is an example of good leadership. The solution to the situation, however, does not come from Ezra but a man named Shekariah. He recognized the people's unfaithfulness and proposed that they make a covenant to send away the foreign wives and their children. He urged Ezra to act and promised "we" will support you.

1. Shekariah proposed the solution, but it was in accordance with what three people or groups? (v. 3b). What lesson can we learn from this?

The first step (read vv. 5-6)

Ezra began by asking the priests and Levites (think "ministers") to vow to put away their foreign wives, as Shekariah proposed. Again, we see leaders setting the example (note the importance of the example of priests in Leviticus 10:8-11).

2. What did Ezra do next (v. 6)? This matches his view of sin noted last week in his prayer in chapter 9.

Assembly in Jerusalem (read vv. 7-15)

This is sort of like a mandatory congregational meeting. But it wasn't made mandatory just by Ezra but rather by the decision of the officials and elders (v. 8). There were extreme consequences of not coming, again showing how serious they were about the sin. They gather on time, and Ezra confronts them with their sin. He challenges them to honor the Lord by separating from the pagan peoples around them, including any foreign wives they had (vv. 10-11). Most of the people agree (v. 12), but there were four exceptions (v. 15). They say, however, that it will take time to implement the plan and suggest a way of handling it by having each one who sinned meet with the elders and officials of their own town (vv. 13-14).

3. Do you think Ezra's approach was too direct (vv. 10-11)? Explain.
4. What does the response of the assembly in v. 12 indicate about their hearts?

Completion (read vv. 16-17)

Ezra acted on the people's suggestion and appointed leaders to handle the cases (cf. 7:25). After about three months they had dealt with all the people who had married foreign women (compare v. 17 with v. 9). Notice they didn't just make a decision in vv. 13-14 but persevered in carrying it out.

List of those who had married foreign women (vv. 18-44, read if you wish)

Their names are listed, perhaps compiled from notes taken by the leaders mentioned in vv. 16-17 who dealt with each case. The number of people who had married foreign wives was a small percentage of God's people in the area (which included 42,360 from the first wave who returned (2:64), plus the second wave who came with Ezra, plus those who had not been taken into captivity). Still, it was a serious matter.

Wrap-up

It may seem strange to end the book with a list, but Ezra clearly uses a lot of reference material throughout (lists, letters, etc.). And the mission is accomplished! The first returnees laid the foundation of the temple, rebuilt the altar, started offering sacrifices, and then rebuilt the temple itself (Ezra 1-6). Then Ezra's wave of returnees bolstered the temple worship and saw Ezra begin to govern the people according to God's Law, with staying separate from the pagan peoples of the land as a key example (Ezra 7-10).

5. What are some key lessons you learned from Ezra?
6. How has your behavior changed based on what you learned?
7. Write a statement of what you believe God's perspective is on the importance and relationship between the two main purposes of the exiles who returned: restoring worship and restoring holy community.
8. We studied Ezra in part because it seems to be relevant to the "restoration of exiles." Has it inspired you in any way to do a new work of God once you are "restored from the exile" of Covid 19? Describe.

The book of **Nehemiah** is about rebuilding the wall around the city. Part of it took place a little later than Ezra's work, but there is overlap with Ezra as well. Many scholars believe **Malachi** also addresses this same time period. If you are looking for something to read in your personal reading time, you might consider these books.