

## Notes on Ezra Chapter 10

© Copyright David E. Pratte, December 22, 2005, [www.gospelway.com](http://www.gospelway.com)

Verses 1-4

1. What was Ezra doing (v1)? Who joined him?
2. Who confessed Israel's sin? What did he say they had done?
3. What did he recommend should be done to resolve the problem?
4. **Define** repentance. How does the solution fit the meaning of repenting?
5. Application: What does the New Testament teach about people who divorce for a cause besides fornication then remarry? See Matt. 19:9; Rom. 7:2,3; 1 Cor. 7:10,11. How does this situation compare to Ezra 10?

In chap. 9, the returned exiles had discovered a serious spiritual problem in their midst. Many men, including many leaders of the nation, had married wives of foreign nations in disobedience to the law. Ezra had mourned for the sin and prayed to God at length confessing the people's evil. As Ezra continued in this prayer, a large group of people assembled and joined him in grieving for the sin, weeping bitterly.

This chapter describes the solution to the problem that was determined and, in so doing, shows us important principles about removing sin from God's people and spiritual restoration of those who have departed from God's way. In particular, it shows us what needs to be done when people have committed the sin of entering into sinful marriages, which they have no right to enter.

### ***Repentance required giving up the unscriptural wives.***

The solution was proposed by a man named Shechaniah. Nothing else is known about this man, but he was a wise and courageous man to propose the solution. First, he acknowledged what had been done and that it was a sin: men had married people from the surrounding forbidden nations (see notes on 9:2 for Scriptures and details regarding this sin). Yet he said there was hope. Even in time of the deepest sin, there is hope if people are willing to turn from it.

He said the people who were guilty needed to repent, and the only way to overcome the harm done and do proper restitution was to put away the foreign wives and their children. He proposed that they make a covenant with God to do this. This would be done according to the law and according to the guidance of those who tremble at God's law (see on 9:4).

Note that repentance required giving up the wives, since the marriages themselves were illegitimate. They could not continue in the marriages, because they had no right to be in them. They were forbidden because the foreign wives would influence the men of Israel to worship idols and commit other pagan sins. So long as the marriages continued, the sin would continue. So the only solution was to get out of the marriages.

This was done by means of a covenant before God - a solemn promise and commitment before Him (cf. 2 Chron. 34:31). So far as I can tell, this is as far as the legal procedure went. There is no record of any certificate of divorce being given (as in Deut. 24:1ff). The putting away was done by a commitment made before God and before the leaders of God's people. Of course, the men involved had to follow through and cease living with those wives.

### ***Similar repentance is required today.***

The Bible demands repentance as a condition for forgiveness today, even as it did then, whether the sin was committed before conversion or afterward (Luke 13:3,5; 24:47; Acts 17:30; Matthew 21:28-32; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 20:21; 2 Peter 3:9; 2 Corinthians 7:10). And repentance requires undoing the harm done by the wrong acts (Ezekiel 33:14,15; Leviticus 6:1-5; Matthew 21:28-31; Luke 19:8; Philemon 10-14,18,19).

This might involve returning property that we took that belongs to someone else. The thief may have the property in his possession, but it still belongs to the one he stole it from. To truly

repent, he must attempt to return it to the rightful owner (cf. Ezekiel 33:15). A penitent runaway slave must return to its rightful owner (book of Philemon 10-19). (Cf. Acts 26:20; Exodus 22:1-15; Acts 19:18f; Matthew 14:3,4; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

### ***Application to adulterous remarriages***

Specifically, when the sin was taking wives from foreign nations, who would influence the Jews to sin, then the only solution would be to get rid of those wives. Similarly, if a man or woman under the gospel has unscripturally divorced and then married someone else, they too are living in a sinful relationship. The marriage was sinful, not just to enter, but also to continue, because it is adultery (Matthew 19:3-9; 5:31,23; Romans. 7:2,3; 1 Corinthians 7:10f). Once again, the only solution would be to cease the marriage relation, just like this case in Ezra's day. A definite agreement and commitment needs to be made before God and His people in which the couple agrees to separate. Then they must follow through and no longer live together as man and wife.

People want us to think that this is too hard a measure to apply; surely God would not require such sacrifices. Yet He did in this case in Ezra. The people had to give up even their families to make restitution. Jesus plainly said that there would be people who would have to forsake family to serve Him (Luke 14:26; 18:28-30). He said that those who are not willing to do this are not worthy of Him. Yet when it comes down to actual cases, people want to say that surely God would not require such a hard thing!

For further information, see our articles about divorce and remarriage at our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).

### ***Strong spiritual leadership is needed.***

Ezra was encouraged to take the leadership and get the job done (v4). This would take courage to do, and he was urged to have this courage (cf. Josh. 1:5-9). The people in sin need great courage and commitment to make correction, but the leaders of God's people also need great courage and conviction to teach and lead God's people to see the need for such action and to follow through with it.

Such steps are never easy for God's people. The needed change will be made only when the leaders are willing to take a firm Scriptural lead and when the people are willing to follow and make the necessary sacrifices.

Verses 5-8

6. What role did Ezra have in this (vv 4-6)? Why would this be hard?

7. Application: What lessons can we learn about good leadership from Ezra?

8. What were the people commanded to do in vv 7,8? What was the penalty for refusing?

### ***The plan of correction put to action***

Ezra followed through on this plan of action, and required all the guilty people to assemble and put away their wives. He made them take an oath – make the solemn promise required by the covenant that had been agreed upon. This included the leaders and all the people.

He then went into the chamber of Jehohanan, son of Eliashib and there he fasted (eating no bread and drinking no water) and mourned for the guilty of the people. I have no idea who this man was, so apparently it does not matter, except that it was an appropriate place for Ezra to do what needed done. What he did was fast (cf. 8:21) and mourn for the sins of the people. This shows again that the sin was terrible, and it illustrates the purpose of fasting as an expression of grief and/or of repentance or special request of God.

### ***The penalty of those who refused to make correction***

They issued a proclamation that all the people were to come to Jerusalem to make the arrangements for the guilty men to put away their wives as had been agreed upon (v5). The leaders

gave the people three days to come. Those who would not do so, would lose their property and would be separated from the people (i.e., they would “withdraw” from him).

Note that the penalty for refusing to make correction was severe. The sin was great, the correction would be painful, but there were severe penalties for refusing. Likewise, today there must be discipline from the church for members who refuse to correct unscriptural marriages.

In the case of Israel in Ezra’s day, the penalty was loss of property and separation from the people. Today, of course, the New Testament nowhere authorizes seizure of property, but it does teach withdrawing from those who practice sin, including fornication. Living in an unscriptural marriage is adultery (a form of fornication). Therefore, we must withdraw from those who do such and will not separate as described here in Ezra. (1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14,15; Matthew 18:15-17; Titus 3:10,11; Romans 16:17,18; 1 Timothy 1:3-11,19,20; 2 Corinthians 2:6-11).

When we take such measures in these cases today, some people think we are cruel and lack compassion. They claim that such measures go beyond what the Scriptures require. However, God required it in Israel’s case here, and the New Testament passages clearly teach it today.

Verses 9-15

9. What did Ezra tell them? How did the people respond?

10. Who opposed the solution? What lessons can we learn from this opposition?

### ***The people meet to make the correction***

As the leaders had determined, the people gathered in the open square by the temple within the required three days. This occurred on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the ninth month of the year (Ezra had just arrived in the fifth month – 7:8,9). But it was a time of heavy rain, so the people trembled because of the serious problem they faced and because of the rain.

Ezra stood before them and taught them of their guilt in taking foreign wives, as has been discussed (cf. 9:2). He demanded that they make confession and agree to separate from the people of the land and from the pagan wives. Note again that what was required was separation, without mention of a certificate of divorce.

### ***Confession required***

The correction required separation from the foreign wives. But they also had to confess the sin to God. This was required for Israelites who sinned under the law. See Lev. 26:40-42; Josh. 7:19-21; Prov. 28:13.

Confession of sin is also required as a condition of forgiveness for children of God today who sin. We must not only repent of the sin, we must pray to God for forgiveness. Then we must change our lives and make restitution. See Acts 8:22; Matthew 6:12; 21:28-32; 1 John 1:8-10.

### ***The congregation’s commitment to do right***

The congregation responded to Ezra by agreeing they would do as he had taught. However, they appealed to Ezra to give them more time. There were many people involved, it would be a very difficult thing to do, and it was a time of heavy rain.

So they requested that the leaders of the congregation supervise the matter, and let people who were involved in the sin come with their city leaders, each city at an appointed time, till the matter was resolved. In this way they would turn away God’s wrath. Note that God’s wrath continues until correction is made.

### ***Opposition from within the congregation***

Though the people did agree to make correction, there was some opposition. Two men named Jonathan and Jahaziah led the opposition, supported by Meshullam and Shabbethai.

As it was then, so it is today. One can be sure that there are those from among God’s people who will oppose the efforts of faithful men of God to lead the people to make needed reforms to please God. Invariably it seems that change for the good comes only against the will of some within the congregation who ought to support the truth.

This seems to be true in general, but in particular it is true in the matter of unscriptural marriages. When faithful men preach the need for those in adulterous remarriages to repent and leave their marriages, there will be those who say this is not required and that those who say it is needed are false teachers or unnecessarily troubling the people. In such cases, as with Ezra, God's faithful servants must continue on to stand for truth and lead people to obey.

Verses 16-19

11. Who was included among the transgressors (v18)? What lessons does this teach us?
12. What else did the people have to do to make correction (v19)?

### ***The people begin to put away the sinful marriages***

As the agreement had been made, the process was begun whereby the people would put away their foreign wives. Ezra and other leaders were in charge of investigating and questioning each man regarding his guilt. From the tenth month to the first month the work continued. So the whole process took a total of three months to complete!

The first ones mentioned as being guilty were actually sons of the priests, even sons of Jeshua the high priest and his brothers! (See regarding Jeshua on 5:2; Haggai 1:1,12.) So indeed the problem did reach to families of some of the very most influential leaders among the people (see 9:2).

All these promised to put away their foreign wives. Then they had to offer the sacrifice for trespass as required by the law. So today, those in unscriptural marriages must promise to separate from their unscriptural spouses and must meet the New Testament conditions of forgiveness (repentance, confession, and prayer), then they must follow through and separate from their unscriptural companions.

Verses 20-44

13. Think: Why would God list in the book the names of the individuals who committed the sin? What lessons should we learn?
14. What else would make the solution hard (v44)?
15. Case Study: Suppose someone argues that God would not require people in unscriptural remarriages today to separate, because it would be too hard. How would you respond?

### ***A list of the names of other guilty individuals***

Here is a list of the names of the individuals involved. We may wonder why God would bother to list the names. But there are lessons we can learn.

First, we can learn that the Bible does not hesitate to identify sinners by name. Some today would claim that we should not name people who are guilty of sin, but the Bible does not hesitate to do so. Fortunately, these apparently repented and changed.

Furthermore, such lists help us appreciate that the people who committed this sin and had to leave their wives were real people. These people would have been known to their friends and neighbors. The application of God's law then, like now, was not just a matter of theory. It had practical consequences in personal lives. Often today God's people will preach His word about some issue until it affects someone they personally know – perhaps some close friend or family member. Then suddenly they may change their doctrine rather than acknowledge that their loved ones are in sin and must make the necessary sacrifice to correct their lives. This list of names shows us that real people committed real sins and had to make the sacrifice necessary to repent. We must not hesitate today to stand for truth no matter whom we know that is affected by the teaching.

### ***Note the involvement of children in these families.***

We are expressly told that some of the wives that were put away, also had children. This would make it especially hard for the husbands to put them away. Nevertheless, the people obeyed.

Today, the existence of children is often used as an excuse why people in unscriptural marriages must not be required to put away their spouses. This is a play for sympathy, and indeed it is difficult. Not only must the husband and wife give up their marriage, but the children are left without a normal family relationship. But God used this case to make it clear that this problem does not justify continuing to live in a sinful marriage.

Note that, this situation would be different from today in one regard. 10:3 shows that the men not only put away the wives, but also put away the children of those wives. The only reason I can think of for that relates to the reason why the marriages were sinful to begin with: the pagan wives would influence the people of Israel into sin. Often such influence comes through the children. The children may be influenced into sin by their pagan parent, then the children in turn influence the faithful parent or the children of other families into sin. So the only solution, given the reason why the marriages would be sinful, would be to separate the wives and their children from the congregation.

This is not true, however, of the reason today why unscriptural remarriages are adulterous. It has nothing to do with any guilt or probable guilt of the children. It has to do with the parent who divorced without Scriptural grounds and then remarried. The children are in no way to blame for this. So, when the parents separate, both parents are still responsible to love and care for the children as parents ought to do. Making proper arrangements for this may be difficult, but the faithful parents should surely continue their relationship with their children.

### ***Conclusion of the book***

Under Ezra's guidance, not only had another group of exiled Jews returned to Palestine, but a great spiritual reform had occurred. God's people had been in great error and apostasy. Reform occurred only by diligent effort in the face of great hardship and opposition. This was not easy, but required great sacrifice and commitment. Likewise, it is not easy to reform God's people today either, but we must have the commitment necessary to stand for truth and make the sacrifices needed.

© Copyright David E. Pratte, December 22, 2005

These study notes are copyrighted but are made available free to individuals for personal study.

They must not be reproduced for distribution (other individuals may download their own copy from our web site). In no case may these commentaries be reproduced in any form for sale or a financial fee. All rights reserved. To see our copyright guidelines for more details go to

[www.gospelway.com/copyrite.htm](http://www.gospelway.com/copyrite.htm)

**For other free Bible commentary study notes, please visit**

[www.gospelway.com/commentary/](http://www.gospelway.com/commentary/).

**To find topical study notes or online Bible courses about Bible topics, Christianity, and Christian doctrine, see the following links:**

**Free online Bible Study Courses & Lessons – [www.biblestudylessons.com](http://www.biblestudylessons.com)**

**Study our Online Bible Study Guides (the Gospel Way) – [www.gospelway.com](http://www.gospelway.com)**

**Free e-mail Bible study newsletter - [www.gospelway.com/update\\_subscribe.htm](http://www.gospelway.com/update_subscribe.htm)**

**Information about copyright permission or restrictions - [www.gospelway.com/copyrite.htm](http://www.gospelway.com/copyrite.htm)**