


# RESTORING THE BROKEN

## A Study of Ezra and Nehemiah


Read Ezra 9 & 10.

1. The first group of returned exiles began well; what was their desire on their arrival in the Promised Land? (Review 3:2, 4, 10.)
  
2. The people soon stumbled by neglecting the building of the temple, but after God spoke to them through Haggai and Zechariah, they resumed work and finished their task (6:15). They joyfully dedicated the house of God, made offerings, and “installed the priests... and the Levites... for the service of God at Jerusalem, according to what is written in the Book of Moses” (6:18).  
Now, nearly 60 years later, and approximately four months after his own arrival, Ezra receives word of a great sin among the people.
  - a. What have some of the people done? (9:1–2)
  
  - b. What is at the heart of their sin? (9:2b, 4; 10:2, 10)
  
  - c. Who has fallen into this sin? (9:1–2;  \* Compare 10:18 with 3:2, 8–9 and 5:2.)
  
3. When Ezra hears this report, how does he respond? (9:3–5; 10:1, 6)

### INTERMARRIAGE

“Humanly speaking, there may have been reasons for such intermarriages, such as a disparity between the number of returning men and available Jewish women.”<sup>1</sup> Commentator Edwin Yamauchi notes, “A better translation than ‘foreign wives’ [in 10:11] might be ‘pagan wives,’ implying not only a different nationality, but adherence to a different religion”; “these are specifically wives... who had not abandoned their worship of other gods, for 6:21 makes it clear that such people could join the people of Israel if they were willing to follow the Lord God alone.”<sup>3</sup> One reason the marriages here in Ezra were sinful was that “marrying those who did not belong to Yahweh was infidelity for the people of Israel, who were considered to be the bride of Yahweh.”<sup>4</sup>

4. Among the ancient Israelites, “rending one’s garments commonly expressed distress or grief.”<sup>5</sup> Why is Ezra’s grief so intense?
  - a. Consider his character (7:10–11).
  - b. Consider the danger this sin poses for the Israelites. (You may wish to read what happened to Solomon when he married women from other nations: 1 Kings 11:1–13.)
5. What commands had God given the people to keep them from this danger? (9:10–12; Exod. 34:15–16; Deut. 7:1–6)
6. The Israelites who gather around Ezra and stay with him in his grief are referred to as those who “trembled at the words of the God of Israel” (9:4). What do you think this says about them?
7. Has Ezra himself committed the sin in question?

Nevertheless, how does he pray? (Consider the pronouns he uses.) ( Dan. 9:3–19)

Why do you think he prays this way, even though he personally is not guilty of this particular sin?

8. What characteristics of God does Ezra recall in his prayer? (9:8–9, 13, 15)
9. What does Ezra confess in his prayer that God would be justified in doing? (9:14)

**“OUR GOD GIVES LIGHT TO OUR EYES” (9:8)**

“An increase in light— ‘gives light to our eyes’— means vitality and joy (1 Sam 14:27, 29; Ps 13:3...; 19:8...; Prov 15:30...).”<sup>6</sup> We have a similar expression in English – “her eyes lit up.”

What would Ezra have been justified in doing, given the authority King Artaxerxes bestowed on him in 7:25–26?

Ezra could have come down on the people like a ton of bricks, but he does not. How would you characterize his response? (Consider the attitude behind Ezra’s prayer and Ezra’s actions, which you noted in your answer to Question 3.)

Evaluate Ezra’s leadership in this sticky situation.

10. What drastic action do the Israelites take to rid themselves of the sin they have committed? (10:2, 3, 11)

This is no easy matter. How do they set about doing this?  
10:7-9

10:12-17

**SENDING THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN AWAY**

When the pagan women were sent away, their children went with them since “in ancient societies... mothers were given custody of their children when marriages were dissolved.”<sup>7</sup> Although this sending away of wives and children may seem severe to us, such a remedy was “necessary to preserve the spiritual heritage of Israel.”<sup>8</sup> Those who were sent away “probably returned to their non-Jewish families.”<sup>9</sup>

11. Ezra and his fellow Israelites in this story are models of repentance from sin. Like them, we in the church are called to be holy (1 Pet. 1:15–16; 2:5, 9), taking our own sin and sin in the church seriously. How are we to deal with sin as believers in Christ? Choose two of the shorter passages or one of the longer passages below to help you answer this question.

Psalm 139:23–24

Mark 9:43–47

Romans 7:21–8:4

Ephesians 4:22–5:18

1 Thessalonians 5:22

James 4:4–10

1 John 5:21

12. Ezra ends with a permanent record of the names of men who had sinned by taking pagan wives. Our names could also be permanently recorded as transgressors. But what do the death and resurrection of Jesus mean for us who are guilty? (Col. 2:13–14)

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This study has been adapted and expanded with permission from a study of the same name by Bridge Community Church, Phila., PA.

 \* For further study

<sup>1</sup> Edwin Yamauchi, “Ezra, Nehemiah” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version: 1 Kings–Job*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 662.

<sup>2</sup> Yamauchi, 671.

<sup>3</sup> *ESV Study Bible*, ed. Lane T. Dennis (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 818, note on 9:1–2.

<sup>4</sup> Yamauchi, 663–64.

<sup>5</sup> Yamauchi, 664.

<sup>6</sup> Yamauchi, 666.

<sup>7</sup> Yamauchi, 669.

<sup>8</sup> Yamauchi, 677.

<sup>9</sup> *ESV Study Bible*, 820, note on 10:18–44.