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The Calling of a Public Assembly
Ezra 10: 7-15

The calling of a public assembly DIG: Why did Ezra respond so vehemently to the Jews' marrying foreigners? Why was that such a big problem for God's people? Why had the Jews married foreigners in the first place? Considering that they had just recently moved to a new home far from Persia, what factors might have made such marriages seem acceptable to them at the time? Why does God condemn marriage between a believing and unbelieving spouse? What dangers does it pose to the believer? To the children? To the Church as a whole? How do some believers justify marriage to an unbeliever as "no big deal?" What arguments do they use? What does God's Word say on the matter?

REFLECT: Why does God hate divorce? Why did Yeshua make an exception in the case of adultery (Matthew 5:32)? How are adultery and divorce similar? What does it mean to be unequally yoked? How does this principle apply in other areas of life? How do the scriptures affect your marriage? How do they affect your views on divorce? How do these teachings apply to your own life?

Tevet 19, 458 BC During the ministry of Ezra (**to see link click Bf – The Second Return**).
Compiled by: The Chronicler from the Ezra and Nehemiah memoirs
(see **Ac – Ezra-Nehemiah from a Jewish Perspective: The Ezra Memoirs**)**.**

Following a night of fasting in **the room of Jehohanan (**probably a priest who had a room in the Temple complex **Ezra 10:6), a proclamation was circulated throughout Judah and Jerusalem for all of the exiles to assemble in Jerusalem (Ezra 10:7).** As **they** had done two months earlier (see **Bp – The Israelites Confess Their Sins**), **all the people were brought as a single body into the plaza that was before the Water Gate (Nehemiah 8:1a)**. **The Temple** area was always the center of action in the book of **Ezra**.

Everyone who did not come within three days, would forfeit (Hebrew: *cherem*, *which refers to putting something under a ban*) **all his property to the Temple treasury (Leviticus 7:21) according to the counsel of the officials and the elders, and would himself be cut off** (Hebrew: *karet,* meaning *the individual was devoted to destruction* or *excommunicated*) **from the assembly of the exiles (Ezra 10:8).** This seems drastic, but the situation required stern measures if the community of **YHVH** was going to survive. The little community was in grave danger of being absorbed in the syncretism of its stronger and more powerful neighbors.[188] Given that only the territories of Judah and Benjamin were involved, the greatest distance for the proclamation to travel would have been no more than forty to fifty miles.[189]

So within three days all the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled in Jerusalem. On the twentieth day of the ninth month of Kislev**, a little more than four months after Ezra's arrival, all the people were sitting in the plaza before the House of God, trembling because** of fear of **God's** wrath and over concern about **their** families being separated – **and because of the rain (Ezra 10:9). This must have been exceptionally heavy** because the Hebrew uses the plural of intensity, **and the men interpreted the abnormal rainfall as a sign of Ha'Shem's displeasure.**

On December 19, 458 BC, on a cold, rainy day in **Jerusalem**, **the leaders** stood and shivered as accusations were read, demanding a confession and a willingness to agree collectively to reform. Bad weather prohibited a long speech. Wasting no time, **Ezra** summarized what had been said two months earlier (see **Bo – Ezra's Prayer about Intermarriage**), **he** cited **their** sin of unfaithfulness, pronounced **their** guilt, and challenged **them** to acknowledge **their** sin and do something about it by becoming separate from **their** unbelieving foreign wives **(Second Corinthians 6:14)**. **Then Ezra the cohen stood up and said to them, "You have been unfaithful and taken** unbelieving **foreign wives, increasing the guilt of Isra'el. They** had violated **the Torah** and with it **His** covenant. The relationship had to be restored somehow. **So now, give praise to ADONAI, the God of your fathers, and do His will. Separate yourselves from the people of the land and from your foreign wives" (Ezra 10:10-11).** The Bible is clear that **God** allows divorce because of the hardness of the human heart **(Deuteronomy 24:1-5)**, although it was considered a serious matter and one which **ADONAI the God of Isra'el hates (Malachi 2:16)**. **Yeshua** also addressed the problem (see **The Life of Christ Ij – Is It Lawful for a Man to Divorce His**

Wife?). The issue here, however, was not one of race, but faith. **The men** had married unbelievers.

The people responded that **they** agreed, but that matter would take some time because of the large number of **people** involved and because of the rain. In fact, it took three months (see **Bs – Those Guilty of Intermarriage**). **The entire assembly answered and said with a loud voice, "Yes, we will do just as you have said" (Ezra 10:12).**

However, the heavy **rain** and the numbers of **men** made it impossible for the matter to be dealt with in a timely fashion: **There are many people here and it is the rainy season, and we are not able to stand outside. Besides, this task cannot be resolved in one or two days, for we have transgressed greatly in this matter (Ezra 10:13).** This shows us how large the problem was and how widespread that **sinful** practice of mixed marriage was among **the Israelites**.

Let our leaders stand for the whole assembly. A proposal was made that each **man** who had **married a foreign woman** should make **an appointment with the elders and judges of his** hometown so that the matter could be settled locally. **They** agreed to do that **until the burning wrath of our God is turned back from us in this matter (Ezra 10:14).**
This was a good suggestion because **the elders and judges** of each town would know the individuals involved. **They** would know whether **the women** involved were worshipers of **ADONAI** or were still involved in pagan worship. The entire process would last for three months, until March 27, 458 BC, while **the elders and judges** met with **the** offending **men**.

Some opposition to the drastic proposal was to be expected. But the opposition was surprisingly small. **Only** four men, **Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah stood against this, supported by Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite,** but it is not clear why **(Ezra 10:15).** Perhaps they wanted to take care of the matter right away; or maybe they didn't want to take care of it at all. There may have been friends or relatives whom some of those four men wanted to protect.[190]
At least one of them, **Meshullam the Levite** was mentioned **(Ezra 10:29)**, but it was an extremely common name at the time, in fact, there are ten different **Meshullams** mentioned in **Ezra-Nehemiah**.



Believers should not marry unbelievers: For us today, **Ezra's** reaction to **the Jews** marrying unbelievers might seem extreme. But, we must take care not to trust our modern way of thinking into **God's** Word. **Ezra's** response to the situation showed how seriously **ADONAI** took the sin of intermarriage. Indeed, **the Israelites** were returning from exile and rebuilding **the Temple** indicated that **YHVH** did indeed take intermarriage seriously – for it was that very sin that had led the nation into idolatry in the first place. The Scriptures refer to **believers** who are married to **unbelievers** as **unequally yoked.** The word picture comes from a pair of oxen that a farmer would use to pull his plow. The two animals would be connected with a yoke. If the two oxen had different ideas concerning their roles as they pulled the plow in different directions, with one trying to pull left and the other pulling to the right. The result would be obvious, the field would not be plowed and the plow itself might be destroyed in the contest of wills. Paul warned clearly: **Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship does light have with darkness (Second Corinthians 6:14)?**

Two further principles are given for **the believer** who is already married to an **unbeliever**. First, he or she is not permitted to seek a **divorce** even though the marriage is unequal because **God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16).** Paul teaches us: **But to the rest I say – I, not the Lord – if any brother has a wife who is not a believer, and she agrees to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if any woman has a husband who is not a believer, and he agrees to live with her, she must not divorce him (First Corinthians 7:12-13).** Second, if an **unbeliever** is married to **a believer**, and **the unbeliever** wants a divorce, **the believer** should let **the unbeliever** go. Once again Paul wrote: **But if the unbeliever separates, let him be separated. The brother or sister is not**

bound in such cases, but God has called you to *shalom* (First Corinthians 7:15).[191]