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Those Guilty of Intermarriage

Ezra 10: 16-44

Those guilty of intermarriage DIG: Which of these names have you seen listed elsewhere in Ezra? What is significant about only one singer and three gate-keepers marrying pagan wives (10:24)? Likewise, why do you suppose no Temple servants or descendants of Solomon's servants are guilty of this? Why do you think children were insufficient reason for halting the divorce proceedings (10:44)? Why such furor over only 111 transgressors?

REFLECT: How do you feel about 111 families broken apart? How would you feel seeing your name listed here? Would that diminish the spiritual principle involved? This list of guilty men attests to a momentary purge and purification of Isra'el. Some 25 years later, Nehemiah would confront the same sin of mixed marriages. What does that say about human nature? The tenacity of sin? Where then do you place your hope for a purified Church today (see Matthew 13:24-30)?

March 27, 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).



Ezra knew the story of **Solomon** and **his** foreign wives, and the devastating effect that it had on **Isra'el** (see the commentary on [the Life of Solomon Bx](#) - **Solomon's Wives**). The Jewish family and the convictions of the whole Jewish community were at stake. **Ezra's** action was drastic, but **he** chose the path most likely to protect the Jewish community from

pagan syncretism.¹⁹² It is important for us to see that **Ezra** was not the initial instigator of this measure and was not the one who carried it out. As the Persian representative for reform, **he** bore the ultimate responsibility, but **the people** had agreed as one voice in the matter (see [Bp - The Israelites Confess Their Sins](#)), approving of what **they** saw as **the Lord's** will in a unique situation.¹⁹³

So the exiles did as proposed. Ezra the cohen, leader of the tribunal, set apart men who were patriarchal leaders of their fathers' households each designated by name. So they sat down on the first day of the tenth month to consider the matter, and they were finished dealing with all the men who had married foreign women about three months later **on the first day of the first month** of Nisan (**Ezra 10:16-17**), and almost exactly one year after **they had set out from the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem (Ezra 8:31a)**. **Ezra** and the other spiritual leaders considered each case individually, and it was likely that each unbelieving **wife** was given an opportunity to openly forsake **her** false gods and embrace **the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob** as **Ruth** had done (see the commentary on [Ruth An - Your People Will Be My People and Your God My God](#)). Such repentance would change the marriage from an unequal yoking to a proper marriage between the righteous of the TaNaKh. So, only the wives who were resolute in their unbelief were sent away.

The list of those who divorced **their pagan wives** seems rather short, considering the frequent reference to **many of us (Ezra 10:13)**, so it is possible that at least some of the unbelieving **spouses** repented of **their** pagan ways and embraced **God's** truth. **Among the sons of the cohanim it was found that the following had married foreign women: The sons of Jeshua son of Jozadak and his brothers Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib and Gedaliah (Ezra 10:18)**. At the head of the list of those who had intermarried were the descendants and other relatives of the high priest who first returned with **Zerubbabel** and led in the Temple reconstruction. **They all gave their hands in pledge to put away their wives, and for their guilt, they offered a ram of the flock as a guilt offering (Ezra 10:19)**. Although **the pledge** and **guilt offering** are mentioned only at this point, **they** are probably to be taken as the standard procedure throughout the list.

Also from the sons of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah (Ezra 10:20). Given the fact it took three months to resolve the situation, this list of **113 men** could represent only those in leadership. **There were seventeen priests, ten Levites and eighty-six lay Israelites, which made up of less than one-percent of the total male population that had originally returned under the decree of Cyrus. The record must have been preserved in the Temple archives from which it was copied from the Chronicler.** The

entire process would last for about three months, about two cases a day. There were apparently more violators among **the people**, and even though **Ezra** and **the Jewish leaders** dealt with the problem directly, it would reappear years later under **Nehemiah** (see [Cr](#) - **Nehemiah's Final Reforms**).¹⁹⁴

One might argue that such a small number, just over a hundred men, was so small as to be of no importance. But Scripture doesn't agree with that. The stories of **Achan** in the TaNaKh (**Joshua 7:1-26**), and **Ananias and Sapphira** (**Acts 5:1-11**) are reminders to us of how the sin of a few can have serious consequences in the life of **God's** people. Our sins can bring others to a standstill, draining their spiritual power and influence. **A little hametz leavens the whole batch of dough** (**First Corinthians 5:6**).¹⁹⁵

From the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah (Ezra 10:21).

From the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad and Elasah (Ezra 10:22). The same four clans listed generations earlier (see [An](#) - **Priests, Levites and Temple Servants Who Returned with Zerubbabel: The cohanim, or the priests descending from Aaron, returning**).

From the Levites:

Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah - he is Kelita - Pethahiah, Judah and Eliezer (Ezra 10:23).

From the singers: Eliashib.

From the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri (Ezra 10:24).

Also from Isra'el:

From the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malchijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malchijah and Benaiah (Ezra 10:25).

From the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah (Ezra 10:26).

From the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza (Ezra 10:27).

From the sons of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai and Athlai (Ezra 10:28).

From the sons of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal and Ramoth (Ezra 10:29).

From the sons of Pahath-moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui and Manasseh (Ezra 10:30).

From the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Isshijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon (Ezra 10:31), Benjamin, Malluch and Shemariah (Ezra 10:32).

From the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh and Shimei (Ezra 10:33).

From the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel (Ezra 10:34), Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluhu (Ezra 10:35), Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib (Ezra 10:36), Mattaniah, Mattenai, Jaasai (Ezra 10:37), Bani, Binnui, Shimei (Ezra 10:38), Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah (Ezra 10:39), Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai (Ezra 10:40), Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah (Ezra 10:41), Shallum, Amariah and Joseph (Ezra 10:42).

From the sons of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel and Benaiah (Ezra 10:43).

All these had taken foreign women, and some of them had children by these wives (Ezra 10:44). The chapter ends with a touch of human feeling, in that it recognizes the tragic experience it was. An appropriate provision was doubtlessly made for the divorced **wives** and **children**.

A new start is not a new heart: The **Jews** returned to **the Land** with such promise. **They** had put away **their** idols, and only **those** who wanted to work on the Temple returned. This was a new beginning for **Isra'el**, and the sins of the previous generations of **Jews** must have seemed a distant memory. Yet, a generation or two later, **they** began imitating **their** parents' sins. Passion, lust, and worldliness had fatally compromised them. It was as if the exile had never happened! As someone once said, "The place for the ship is in the sea, but **God** help the ship if the sea gets into it."¹⁹⁶

The main lesson of **Ezra** (and **Nehemiah**, **Haggai**, and **Zechariah**) is that apart from the B'rit Chadashah and **the** indwelling of the **Ruach Ha'Kodesh**, true obedience to **God's** Word is impossible. **ADONAI** repeatedly started over . . . and **the Israelites** repeatedly failed. **He** started with Noah and his family, and sin gripped them as soon as they stepped off the ark. **He** started over with Moshe and a new nation fleeing from Egypt, but ended up

leaving every one of them (except Joshua and Caleb) to die in the wilderness. **YHVH** had again purified **Isra'el** by removing their entire nation from **the Land** for seventy years (see the commentary on [Jeremiah Gu - Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule](#)), but **they** were back to **their** sinful ways again.

This illustrates the fact that a new start does not necessarily indicate a new heart. This is the lesson that **Yeshua** gave **Nicodemus**, who was the teacher of **Isra'el**. **Messiah** told **him**: **Very truly I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless they are born again (John 3:3)**. **Nicodemus** thought **Jesus** was telling **him** to start **his** life over, and **he** wondered how that was even possible. But **the Lord** told **Nicodemus** that without a new heart, fresh starts would simply produce fresh failures. **The Jews** were learning the lesson that **they** didn't need **their** Land, **their** Temple, or the walls that **Nehemiah** would eventually build. What **they** needed was **their Messiah**.¹⁹⁷