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**C1327 – August 7, 2013 – Ezra 10:1-44**  
**The People Restored**

Tonight we want to conclude our study of Ezra. The first half of the book, chapters 1-6, occurred between 538-515BC during which time a remnant of the people returned to the land from exile and rebuilt the temple. The second half of the book, chapters 7-10, occurred 58 years later when a second remnant of the people returned to the land from exile with Ezra and he led them in returning to the Lord from whom they had departed.

Last time we saw in Ezra 9 how he returned in the fourth month of 458BC and by the ninth month his newly appointed judges revealed that many of the Jews in the land had violated the Mosaic Law by marrying pagan wives. Consequently God was angry and was disciplining them for their sin. If the sin was allowed to continue it would threaten God's covenant program for the nation Israel. Ezra as the greatest scholar, practitioner and expositor in the world at that time was appalled and sat down to fast and pray along with others who feared the words of God. When the evening offering came he publicly fell upon his knees and lifted his palms to heaven confessing his sin and the sin of his nation. In a short recitation of history he recalled how they had sinned in this fashion before and been disciplined accordingly. Now that they had been granted a window of grace enabling them to return and rebuild the Temple and city of Jerusalem committing the same sin was trampling on the grace of God. Therefore God would be fully justified in destroying them completely if He so desired. Any hope for being spared rested solely on God's mercy stemming from God's covenant love.

As we come into Ezra 10 tonight we know that from the human standpoint the main need is that the nation confess her sin in order to be restored to fellowship so they could come out from under the discipline of God and be restored to the place of blessing in the land. The reason the sin of marrying

pagan girls was such a danger was because when you married a beautiful Gentile girl you didn't just import the pretty girl, you imported the pretty girl and her pagan beliefs. All pagan beliefs at root are idolatrous, they have a different view of God, that god may be greater than man, may have a higher IQ than man, may be stronger than man but the difference between pagan gods and man is always one of degree rather than kind. Pagan gods are higher on the scale of being but we are all on the same scale and therefore the continuity of being is at work, that worldview is a product of the pagan mind, the idea that we can encapsulate, so to speak, everything within the same existence. That's the essence of paganism. Biblically, God is greater than man and has a higher IQ than man and is stronger than man but the difference between God and man is one of kind not degree. God is not on a scale of being along with man, animals and rocks, God is distinct from His creation and therefore the Creator-creature distinction is the ruling principle. That worldview is God's revelation to man in the Bible; the concept that essentially there are two levels of being or existence, not one. And since your concept of God colors your logic, your ethics and everything else in life then it was and remains vitally important that you marry a girl who has the same concept of God as you. That's why it was so crucial that Jews married Jews; ultimately it was a theological issue.

Now there was a way you could marry a nice pagan girl, and this procedure is described in Deut 21:10-14 where the issue of war brides is broached. The only way you could marry a war bride in Israel was if she totally cut herself off from her culture and adopted the God of Israel who is the Creator. That's what you see in the OT with Rahab who was a Canaanite or with Ruth who was a Moabite. These girls married Jewish men but the difference is they believed in the God of Israel before they married the Jewish men. And a little bit of this marrying was okay but there are other issues involving the blood line, particularly the royal blood line of David that put some limits on how much intermarriage with Gentile girls could occur. We know some could occur because we find both Rahab and Ruth in the royal genealogy of Matt 1. But apparently there were limits on how much of this you wanted to allow in because it could work itself out in a runaway effect where all identity is lost. That's the problem of assimilation and so God wanted to stop that assimilation before it got out of hand. The Messiah, for example, had to be a Jew of the tribe of Judah, of the house of David and that had to be verifiable in the Temple records. As of AD70 those records are gone, destroyed by Titus

and the Roman armies. So what that tells you is that the Messiah had to come before AD70 because that's the last time His credentials could be verified. Another issue is the credentials of the priestly tribe of Levi and in particular the Cohanim, the priestly line stemming from Aaron. Their identity is important because they're going to serve in the Millennial Temple. But I'm going to leave it up to the Lord Jesus Christ to identify them. There are studies that have taken common names of the Cohanim like Levi, Leventhal, Cohen, Kohane, et. al. and done genetic research of Y chromosomal markers in these men and the results have been very interesting. There seems to be a remarkable preservation of the Cohanim priestly line.<sup>1</sup> But ultimately their identification will be made by the Lord Jesus Christ when He returns in His kingdom. Then we have the twelve tribes of Israel and their identity is important because 12,000 from each tribe are going to be sealed during the future 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel in order to do the work of evangelism. That identity again I think is being preserved by God right now in preparation for that time. Further they'll be given land allotments in the kingdom and so their identity must be preserved. All of this relates in some way to the danger of Jews engaging in intermarriage.

But I think the essential problem here of intermarrying is the danger of a runaway effect that resulted in the loss of identity of the priestly line and the Messianic line. Those two lines had to be kept pure, the royal seed line until the First Coming of the Messiah and the Levitical priest line until the Second Coming of the Messiah, so the Levitical priest line is still an issue today and God is protecting it beyond corruption so that in the Millennial Kingdom there will be some Levitical priests who are qualified to serve in the Millennial Temple. There's a lot going on here in the time of Ezra but chiefly in their mind was the concern over the sin of marrying pagan girls and what they were going to do about that. Are they going to permanently divorce these wives or temporarily separate from them?

As I mentioned, there was a procedure for marrying foreign girls that is described in detail in Deut 21:10-14. This is the passage on War Brides and some commentators claim this was the procedure used to solve the Ezra situation. Laney is representative, "Ezra does not use the normal Hebrew words for divorce. Ezra may have had in mind a temporary separation, perhaps in keeping with the procedures for marrying captive women (Deut. 21:10-14), rather than divorce...The steps taken in Ezra 10 were with a view

to preserve the religious purity of the returned exiles.”<sup>ii</sup> It seems to me there’s some truth and some error in this claim. The error is that Ezra does not use the normal Hebrew words for divorce. It seems to me that in Ezra 10:3 he uses the Hebrew for “put away” which is the same Hebrew word used of divorce in Deut 24:2. While some of the words here in Ezra 10 are not the common words for Hebrew divorce this one is and puts into question Laney’s claim. The truth in his claim is that the steps taken in Ezra 10 were with a view to preserve the religious purity of the returned exiles. That is very obviously what Ezra and the faithful Jews were concerned about. They were concerned about God’s discipline upon them and how to rectify that situation. But all in all I don’t think Laney’s approach goes far enough. I would agree that the steps taken are designed to preserve religious purity but I would not agree that this rules out divorce. Further, Laney seems afraid that he might give Christians a justification for divorce if he admits the language of divorce is used in Ezra 10. However, if we look at the chapter with an enlarged purpose of protecting the royal seed line and the Levitical priest line from being lost to history then any claim of justifying Christian divorce from this passage vanishes.<sup>iii</sup> In the end Laney’s approach is short-sighted, it rightly argues that the religiously mixed marriages introduced idolatry and invited God’s discipline but it wrongly diagnoses the problem claiming a temporary separation was all that was needed giving the girls time to decide whether they wanted to worship the God of Israel or not.

The other approach is to argue that there is a higher purpose in Ezra 10 concerning the protection of the Messianic line and the Levitical priest line and therefore the language of Ezra 10 is the language of getting a divorce. Pentecost is representative, “Because the Israelites had disobeyed God’s law of marriage and had married Gentile wives, the line would have been corrupted. If the line were corrupted, Messiah could not come in Abraham’s line. It became necessary then to purify the nation to prevent the corruption of the line. There divorce was permitted...Thus the uncleanness of Deuteronomy 24:1 had to do with a corrupted bloodline.”<sup>iv</sup> Obviously you can see here that Pentecost is claiming that there was some degree of purity in the bloodline that had to be maintained. I don’t know about that since Jewishness is passed on exclusively by the father. If the father was a Jew the mother could be anything. For example, Rahab and Ruth were both married to Jewish men and their offspring were fully Jewish. But I think his point about divorce being permitted here is valid because the real threat is a

runaway effect of intermarriages that could result in the loss of identity of the Messianic and Levitical priest lines.

So there is truth to both Laney and Pentecost's approaches and neither is really exclusive of the other when we see them as working together. Laney is right when he says "The steps taken in Ezra 10 were with a view to preserve the religious purity of the returned exiles." Pentecost is right when he says "divorce was permitted." Divorce it appears was the means by which the religious purity was maintained and the danger of a runaway effect halted. So I'm concluding that divorce is being authorized in this chapter.

Now some would argue that we can't tell from this chapter whether divorce was authorized by God or not, whether it was God's will or not. On one hand there is no explicit statement regarding whether or not these divorces were the will of God. The chapter just ends with an agreement to divorce their wives. However, if this was the will of God how does that reconcile with what God said in Malachi, I hate divorce. In the case of Malachi what had the Jews done? They had divorced their Jewish wives to marry Gentile wives. So it's obviously why God says that there the divorces led to pagan intermarriages again. In Ezra however, I would argue that divorce was the will of God and I would say that it is obvious that it was the will of God. Why? First, because God had raised up Ezra to return to the land for this very purpose. To say that divorce here is not the will of God is to say that Ezra failed to do the will of God and I think that's nonsense. Second, God turned the heart of King Artaxerxes to send Ezra back to the land. Again, I think this just confirms that it was God's will working through Gentile kings to preserve the religious heritage of Israel so that the runaway effect into idolatry and assimilation wouldn't proliferate and all identity be lost. So I take it that these divorces were the will of God but I don't take it that this passage can be used to justify divorce in any situation today! The concerns here are isolated to Jewish issues that have nothing to do with the Church. The Church is given clear instructions in 2 Cor 6 and 1 Cor 7. If you've never been married or you're a widow it's good to remain unmarried, but if you lack self-control then marry a fellow believer and remain married to them; if you are already married to an unbeliever then do not divorce them, if they divorce you then let them go. But the issue here is an authorization of divorce on the basis of the fact that Jewish issues involving obedience to God and the dangers of a runaway effect into idolatry rendering the priestly and Messianic line unidentifiable.

If you turn to Jer 33:17 briefly, here you find how important the identity of the Messiah and the Levitical priests are. “For thus says the Lord, ‘David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; 18and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to prepare sacrifices continually.’” Both lines are important. Verse 19, “The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, 20“Thus says the Lord, ‘If you can break My covenant for the day and My covenant for the night, so that day and night will not be at their appointed time, 21then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant so that he will not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levitical priests, My ministers. 22“As the host of heaven cannot be counted and the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me.’” Covenantally, they are important and therefore if God keeps His word these lines must maintain their identity.

Alright, let’s look at Ezra 10. I had to give you the big picture up front so you didn’t lose the forest for the trees. That’s the big picture of God’s unconditional covenant plan for Israel; inside of that plan we see Ezra and other righteous Jews concern over conditional covenant the nation had violated. Verse 1, **Now while Ezra was praying and making confession, weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God,** he was still doing this, carrying over from chapter 9, and as he was confessing **a very large assembly, men, women and children, gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept bitterly.** I take it he was in the court of the Gentiles; the Temple has several courts, the court of the Gentiles, the court of the women, the court of the Israelites, the court of the priests, the Temple court, all getting closer to the Most Holy Place. I take it Ezra was in a very public place outside the Temple, probably the court of the Gentiles. This is where all the action took place. And he’s there at the time of the evening offering lying **prostrate**, that’s a prayer posture where you’re just lying down flat on the ground; not very comfortable. And he’s **weeping** and this starts to get people’s attention and as he’s praying and confessing they’re being convicted of their sin, they’re all identifying with the sin of their nation, **men, women and children** and so they **gathered to him** and corporately now they’re weeping **bitterly**. They realize the seriousness of what they had done.

Verse 2 and here steps forward **Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam**. He's going to give Ezra some advice on what to do here. Who is this man? We don't know much about him but we know he's **one of the sons of Elam** and down in verse 26 you see some other "sons of Elam." These other sons were involved in the sin of mixed marriages: "Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth and Elijah." But you don't see Shecaniah in this list do you? So he's in this family but he didn't commit the sin of intermarriage. That means he's watched his family members commit this sin over and over and I take it he's seen a lot more than just pagan marriages, he's seen a lot of idolatry creeping in and working its way out in pagan reasoning and ethics, he's starting to see the runaway effect. So he knows first-hand the consequences of marrying a pagan and he comes alongside Ezra because he sees something has to be done. Verse 2, "**We have been unfaithful to our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel in spite of this.**" So he recognizes **there is still hope for Israel** but that hope is contingent on his advice in verse 3.

**So now let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.** The Hebrew word **put away** (*yasa*) is the same Hebrew word used in Deut 24:2 of divorce which is probably the passage in **the law** that he is referring to at the end of the verse. Now if you turn there this is the passage that Pentecost says addresses the right of divorce when the marriage involves a corrupt bloodline. I'm not sure about that but there's no doubt that this verse does refer to conditions when you could legally divorce your wife and it's this verse Shecaniah is referring to. Verse 1 says, "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her," that Hebrew word indecency is the word for "nakedness" or "shame." It's a fairly broad term. Shecaniah saw justification in calling on this passage to justify divorce because the Jewish men didn't wait to see if these girls would convert to worship the God of Israel, they just married them, pagan baggage and all and so he's concerned that they're bringing pagan religion into the nation and this is going to result in divine discipline and eventual loss of identity. So if he has found some indecency in her and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his

house” etc...the Hebrew there in verse 2, “leaves” is the same word in Ezra 10:3, “put away” and it’s the language of a divorce proceeding. So Shecaniah was advising Ezra that the people **make a covenant**, a pledge **with God to divorce all the wives and their children** on the basis of this law.

Ezra 10:4 **Arise!** says Shecaniah, **For this matter is your responsibility, but we will be with you; be courageous and act.**” The matter was Ezra’s **responsibility** because the King had given him executive power. It was his duty to act. **But** Shecaniah assures him that he will not be alone in acting, **we will be with you; be courageous and act.** It would be difficult to work up the courage to stand against a sin problem in a nation that you had just arrived in five months before so he’s going to have support. Now he’s got to deal with this very big problem and a very sensitive problem. Look at what he’s suggesting be done in verse 3, **put away all the wives and their children**, it’s not just wives but it’s also children. This is going to be very difficult. There are family relationships involved here, deep seated emotions. Fensham says, “This proposal is harsh in the light of modern Christian conceptions. Why should innocent children be punished? We must remember that the religious influence of the mothers on their children was regarded as the stumbling block. To keep the religion of the Lord pure was the one and only aim of Ezra and the returned exiles. As a small minority group, the repatriates lived in the Holy Land among a large population of influential people who were followers of various polytheistic religions. Against such larger numbers they had to defend themselves and their religious identity. Thus the drastic measures are understandable.”<sup>v</sup> Rabbi Dow Marmor, in his book *Intermarriage* argues that assimilation is the greatest danger to Jewish survival. In 1978 he wrote, “...the greatest danger to Jewish survival outside Israel today is not anti-Semitism but assimilation, epitomized by the threat of intermarriage . . . [and it] is a direct threat to Judaism, for without Jews Judaism cannot exist.”<sup>vi</sup> In other words, what he means is Gentile girls are cute and a huge temptation. Therefore Satan has used the temptation to marry Gentile girls over and over and over, for without the Jewish identity and presence in the world God can’t fulfill His covenants and if God’s covenant program is broken then Satan has conquered. That’s why the Jew is the key to history. When Walvoord was asked years ago what the greatest modern miracle was he said, “The Jew!” Plain and simple, the Jew. Strategy after strategy has been and is being employed to rid the world of the Jew and Marmor interestingly says the most dangerous threat today is not anti-



Semitism but intermarriage. An amazing observation! Underlying it are the sin patterns of lust and temptation that lead to intermarriage and assimilation.

It was going on in Ezra's day and it's going on in our day. So here's Ezra having to deal with it and in verse 5, he's been advised to act by Shecaniah, exercising his executive powers against a very sensitive sin problem in the nation. **Then Ezra arose and made the leading priests, the Levites and all Israel, take oath that they would do according to this proposal; so they took the oath.** He executes his executive powers. Verse 6, **Then Ezra arose from before the house of God and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib. Although he went there, he did not eat bread nor drink water, for he was mourning over the unfaithfulness of the exiles.** Another fast, this is the third fast we've seen Ezra take in five months. The first one was a normal fast, morning to evening on the banks of the river of Ahava before they left on the dangerous journey, the second was a normal fast, morning to evening in front of the Temple when he found out about the sin of intermarriage, this is the third and it, as you can see in verse 8, this was a three day fast, no bread and no water for three days, so it is an absolute fast and this kind of fast means serious business. So he's tucked away in the chamber of Jehohanan, he's not fasting publicly, he's fasting privately, this is a private priestly chamber and he's in **mourning over the unfaithfulness of the exiles.** Hopefully God will recognize how seriously Ezra takes the unfaithfulness.

Verse 7, the others who saw the problem **made a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the exiles, that they should assemble at Jerusalem, and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the leaders and the elders, all his possessions should be forfeited and he himself excluded from the assembly of the exiles.** So under executive order they better show up or else all their possessions are going to be confiscated by the Persian state. It's a pretty serious deal.

Verse 9, **So all the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days,** these were the two southern tribes, Judah the larger, Benjamin the smaller. Together they made up the southern

kingdom of Judah. And with the threat of property confiscation and cutting off from the assembly you better believe they showed up with bells on.

Verse 10, **Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “You have been unfaithful and have married foreign wives adding to the guilt of Israel.** He cites the sin, he just points it out point blank, you violated statute 105.31 of the Deuteronomic Law code **you married foreign wives.** Verse 11, the proper course of action, **Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers and do His will; and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.”**

Here’s the situation, the nation had a relationship with God, they were in this circle, it’s a solid line so you know you can’t get out of this circle, this is their eternal security as a nation; but within this circle is a smaller circle of fellowship and it’s a dashed line to show that they can get in and out of this circle, to stay in it they had to be walking in fellowship, they had to be walking in obedience. Were they walking in obedience? No, he just cited statute 105.31, they were out of fellowship and under divine discipline. Now they’re not out of the relationship, they can’t get out of that. They can get out of fellowship though and then they are out in the sphere of divine discipline. That’s the situation.

In light of the situation Ezra gives two courses of action. First, **make confession to the LORD God of your fathers**, that means fess up, you blew it, it’s not the time for excuses, it’s time to do like David and admit you blew it. This would be a national confession right there facing the Temple. Confession will get them out of discipline and back in the inner circle. But that’s not all Ezra calls for. Second, **do His will.** In other words, obedience, do the Law of Moses, obey it. To stay in fellowship requires obedience, that’s what we mean when we say walk in fellowship, we mean live your life in obedience, walking with the Lord. So first confess, that’ll get you back in fellowship, and second obey, that’ll keep you in fellowship. The details of how they are to stay in fellowship are listed next; **separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.** Why does he add that? Theoretically they could have confessed and then gone home and done nothing about it which would have meant that they were right back out of fellowship and in divine discipline again. So they’ve got to separate themselves from pagan behavior and from the root of the problem, the

marriages to pagan wives. If they didn't it would have that runaway effect we spoke of earlier.

Now we get to the people's response in verse 12, **Then all the assembly replied with a loud voice, "That's right!"** And that right there is a great response. These people have obviously been convicted of their sin, that's the first thing that has to happen. How does that happen? Verse 10, you speak the word of God. The word of God is light and it casts light on darkness. So Ezra cited the word of God and it brought conviction. Now when that happened these people didn't re-examine the Bible and say, "Hmm, is that really what it says?" And they didn't re-interpret the text and say, "Well, I think it means this." There standing in the face of the world's greatest living scholar! And he didn't have a public blemish to his record. They just said, **That's right!** They agreed, at least these people literally interpreted the Bible. So they made a true confession and at this point they are back in fellowship and that's the first thing that had to happen. Then from here on out they're doing the second thing, what is necessary for obedience. They say, **As you have said, so it is our duty to do.** That's the obedience issue.

But verse 13, they set forth some conditions to getting it done. **But there are many people; it is the rainy season and we are not able to stand in the open.** It was pouring down rain when they had this meeting, it was the rainy part of the year and that slows travel down. **Nor can the task be done in one or two days, for we have transgressed greatly in this matter.** In other words, there were a substantial number of marriages that would need to be investigated. Verse 14, **Let our leaders represent the whole assembly and let all those in our cities who have married foreign wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and judges of each city, until the fierce anger of our God on account of this matter is turned away from us.** In other words, they want to solve it locally so they don't have to travel to Jerusalem. And when this suggestion came forth, verse 15, **Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah opposed this, with Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite supporting them.** <sup>16</sup>**But the exiles did so.** So for the most part they agreed to this procedure. **And Ezra the priest selected men *who were heads of fathers' households for each of their father's households*, all of them by name. So they convened on the first day of the tenth month to investigate the matter.** <sup>17</sup>**They finished**

**investigating all the men who had married foreign wives by the first day of the first month.** The investigations lasted three months, there were many marriages investigated but if you count the list of marriages that were found to be mixed in vv 18-43 you find 113.

Now we don't have time to go through the whole list of names. We just want to point out three things. First, vv 18-24 record 16 priests and 10 Levites who had engaged in the pagan intermarriages. This is troubling, especially due to the fact that just 80 years before their descendants came back to the land as the faithful remnant and rebuilt the Temple. Now in just 80 years they are apostate from Moses. Those who were supposed to be the Bible teachers in the land and were violating the Bible is a sad commentary on leadership. That's why God had to bring in Ezra and the new leadership, to get this leadership straightened out. Second, vv 25-43 record the list of the people of Judah and Benjamin who had committed the sin of pagan intermarriages. They were following this apostate leadership. This is to be expected. If the leadership don't follow the word of God then the people will assume that what the leaders do is acceptable. Therefore when the leadership of an organization goes apostate the people often follow suit. Third, verse 44, some of the men had children by these wives and this signals two things. First that these intermarriages had just gotten underway. They didn't have birth control back then so for only some of them to have children indicates the marriages were in their early years. Second, this would be difficult due to the emotional attachments. We should mention that they would have returned any dowry to the rightful family. But it highlights the importance in this period of time of preserving the religious purity in order for God to fulfill His covenant purposes. Ultimately if this hadn't been dealt with so quickly it could have produced the runaway effect and the loss of identity of the nation.

In summary, in Ezra 10, Ezra was weeping and making confession at the Temple lying prostrate. This caught the attention of others who were convicted of the sin of their nation as they heard his prayers. Shecaniah came alongside of Ezra and suggested a course of action as well as his support. Ezra responded by making the leadership in Jerusalem take an oath that they would follow this course of action. When the proclamation went out for all the exiles to gather in Jerusalem Ezra fasted for three days in mourning. When they arrived Ezra cited their violation of the word of God and instructed them to confess and obey the Law of Moses. The people were

convicted of their sin, confessed and returned to their homes to begin obedience. After three months of investigations those who had committed the sin of intermarriage had divorced their wives and sent them away with their children. Fortunately God stopped this process before it was too far gone.

What can we learn from this chapter? First, citation of the word of God is necessary to bring conviction of sin. Ezra cited the passage they had violated and called for confession and obedience. When we find that our lives are contrary to the word of God we ought to know immediately that we need to confess. Second, confession is all that is necessary to be restored to fellowship. The people said, "That's right! And at that moment they were restored to fellowship. When we are confronted with our sin we should admit it immediately so we can be restored to fellowship. Third, obedience is necessary to walk in fellowship. The people immediately went home and began to follow through on carrying out the will of God. After we confess we should set our lives on a new course of obedience in order to overcome the temptation to continue in sin. Fourth, as far as marriage and divorce is concerned, the only principle we can gain from this chapter (because it is repeated for us in the NT) is that we should marry a fellow believer and not an unbeliever. There is no authorization for divorce for a Christian in Ezra.

In summary, God worked providentially in 538BC through Cyrus to issue a decree for the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. About 50,000 Jews returned and began rebuilding the Temple. When they were faced with opposition God worked through Darius to re-instate their right to complete the Temple and He raised up Zechariah and Haggai to encourage the people to finish the work. Once completed they worshipped God properly. In 458BC, after 58 years, the leadership had gone apostate, intermarrying pagan wives. God raised up Artaxerxes to decree the return of Ezra to Jerusalem to restore the people to proper obedience to God. About 5,000 Jews returned with him. When the sin problem was discovered he led the nation to confess their sin and be restored to fellowship and obedience.

In conclusion to the book of Ezra, the first half of the book records how God worked sovereignly through Gentile kings and Jewish prophets to encourage the Jews to return to the land from Babylon and rebuild the Temple in the midst of enemy opposition. The second half of the book records how God's present work was consistent with His past work. He continued to work

sovereignly through Gentile kings and a Jewish Bible teacher to return and restore proper Temple worship. This continual work on behalf of His people Israel in the midst of Gentile powers was essential to the preservation of the Jewish people in the land in preparation for the arrival of the Messiah. Through the story we see how God was also preserving the royal seed line of the Messiah and the Levitical priests necessary to serve in the future Millennial Temple. Ultimately God is still at work on behalf of Israel to fulfill His covenants and establish His purposes on the earth.

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<sup>i</sup> For interesting genetic research being done showing remarkable purity of the Cohanim (priestly members descended from Aaron) see <http://www.aish.com/ci/sam/48936742.html>.

<sup>ii</sup> J. Carl Laney, *Answers to Tough Questions*, p. 97.

<sup>iii</sup> The NT epistles are quite clear. A Christian should marry another Christian and what God has joined let no man separate. If a Christian is married to a non-Christian then the Christian should not divorce the non-Christian but if the non-Christian divorces the Christian the Christian should let them go.

<sup>iv</sup> Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 132.

<sup>v</sup> Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Ezr 10:1). Galaxie Software.

<sup>vi</sup> Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Ezr 10:1). Galaxie Software.

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