

The End Of The Road

Long Beach Alliance Church • June 29th, 2008 • Pastor Chris Lankford

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. 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. THEN ALL THE ASSEMBLY REPLIED WITH A LOUD VOICE, “THAT’S RIGHT! AS YOU HAVE SAID, SO IT IS OUR DUTY TO DO.”

~EZRA 10:10-12 (NASB)

1) A Shocking Solution

- A) The Jews were sent into exile in Babylon because they succumbed to marrying foreign spouses and worshipped idols from other nations (Deuteronomy 7:1-6, cf. 2nd Chronicles 36:11-21).

- B) When confronted by the sin of the people, Ezra repents before God, recognizing that the return from exile is an indication of God’s temporary mercy (Ezra 9:8).

- C) Ezra’s repentance inspires the Israelites toward both renewal and a removal of evil from the community. This included the shocking solution of “putting away” all of the foreign wives and children from intermarriage (10:3).

- D) While the idea appears to come from Shecaniah (10:2-3), in fact he affirms that Ezra was its source, and as such, Ezra should have the confidence to carry out the task (10:4).

- E) Inspired by the support, Ezra finds the "courage to act" and calls on the leaders to support the action against foreign wives and their children (10:5). Ezra continues to fast and pray in mourning for the resolution of this problem (10:6).

2) Excursus On Ezra's Plan & Biblical Divorce

- A) Many of the returnees had divorced their "covenant" wives in favor of marrying the women who were in the land (Malachi 2:10-16). Ezra's reforms may have been a "correction" of this problem in the community.

- B) It is notable that Ezra never asks the people to "divorce" their foreign wives. This could be for one or more of several reasons:
 - i) As noted in 2A, we are certain that some men were married to Jewish wives but had treacherously divorced them, and re-married foreign wives. This was clearly against God's plan (cf. Mark 10:11-12).

 - ii) The "bill of divorce" provided in Deuteronomy 24:1ff was clearly a community guideline for the Jews. Marrying foreign women was out of the question, it was clearly prohibited (Deuteronomy 7:1-6). Thus, from Ezra's perspective, the unions were illegal in the first place.

 - iii) It is notable, despite significant variations in English translations, that Ezra never calls the unions with foreign wives marriages, nor does he ask for divorces.* He doesn't "honor" the unions by addressing them as though they were a marriage "covenant."

- iv) It could also be notable that since Ezra makes no mention of remarriage for any of the Jews, that what he is requesting amounts to separation.
 - v) We know that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:10-16) and that the divorce laws of the Old Testament were a concession rather than an ideal (Mark 10:5-9). In some capacity, this was to assure that adultery never occurred within the "people of God."
- C) The New Testament has some key "summaries" about divorce and remarriage which are important for us:
- i) Jesus Christ notes that divorce itself is not the primary issue of marital dissolution, but remarriage and adultery (cf. Mark 10:2-12). It is the purity of the community which is at stake.
 - ii) Thus, the New Testament notes that a Christian husband or wife should never leave their spouse because one is "of Christ" and the other is not (1st Corinthians 7:10-11). Note that remarriage is again forbidden, since it is a "creation order" issue (see Di).
 - iii) Jesus further taught that the only grounds for divorce and remarriage were infidelity (Matthew 5:32). Coupled with Paul's allowance for divorce on grounds of abandonment by a non-believer (1st Corinthians 7:15), you have the only two situations where divorce and remarriage are allowable.
- D) ALL of this is to assert this simple truth... God insists that our personal relationships and practices not be separated from our faithfulness in worship. Our personal relationships, our personal habits, our personal practices -- are all worship to the Lord (Romans 12:1)

*Although Ezra knows and uses the normal verb for "to marry" (לָקַח, *lāqah*, cf. Ezra 2:61), he uses other terms when he says that they "took" (נָשָׂא, *nāšā'* in 9:2, 12; 10:44) some of the daughters of the land, or "gave a dwelling to" (יָאֲשַׁב, *yāšab* in 10:2, 10, 14, 17–18) foreign women. Ezra uses the hiphil (causative) form of אָשַׁב (*yāšā'*) of "putting away" wives and children in 10:3, 19. Elsewhere in the Old Testament the qal form of אָשַׁב (Deut. 24:2) is used or else גָּרַשׁ (*gāraš*, Lev. 21:7, 14; 22:13; Num. 30:9; Ezek. 44:22) or שָׁלַח (*šālah*, Deut. 22:19, 29; 24:1, 3, 4). Heth and Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce*, 243, n. 28, 29.

THE RETURN FROM EXILE

PHASE	DATE	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	JEWISH LEADER	PERSIAN RULER	EXTENT OF THE RETURN	EVENTS OF THE RETURN
FIRST	538 B.C.	Ezra 1-6	Zerubbabel Jeshua	Cyrus	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Anyone who wanted to return could go. (2) The temple in Jerusalem was to be rebuilt. (3) Royal treasury provided funding of the temple rebuilding. (4) Gold and silver worship articles taken from temple by Nebuchadnezzar were returned. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Burnt offerings were made. (2) The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated. (3) The rebuilding of the temple was begun. (4) Persian ruler ordered rebuilding to be ceased. (5) Darius, King of Persia, ordered rebuilding to be resumed in 520 B.C. (6) Temple was completed and dedicated in 516 B.C.
SECOND	458 B.C.	Ezra 7-10	Ezra	Artaxerxes Longimanus	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Anyone who wanted to return could go. (2) Royal treasury provided funding. (3) Jewish civil magistrates and judges were allowed. 	Men of Israel intermarried with foreign women.
THIRD	444 B.C.	Nehemiah 1-13	Nehemiah	Artaxerxes Longimanus	Rebuilding of Jerusalem was allowed.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Rebuilding of wall of Jerusalem was opposed by Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab. (2) Rebuilding of wall was completed in 52 days. (3) Walls were dedicated. (4) Ezra read the Book of the Law to the people. (5) Nehemiah initiated reforms.