

## Ezra Chapters 9-10 John Karmelich

1. What does one do once one becomes a Christian? Yes I understand reading the bible and hanging around with other believers, but what comes first? Is it about trying to act like a Christian? Does it mean we must abandon everyone we know who isn't a believer? What about our family, what's our relationship with our parents, siblings and children after we accept Jesus? That's the question that's the key issue of the final two chapters of Ezra. Let me explain:
  - a) Chapters 1-6 were about the first Israelites who returned to the land of Israel as the leader of a large empire that controlled the whole Middle East said the Israelites can return there.
  - b) Chapters 7-8 take place almost 60 years later as Ezra himself, a respected priest is leading another large group of Israelites back to Israel. Did others go back and forth other than the two trips mentioned? Probably. However, the focus of Ezra is on the main efforts to start worship at God's temple once again. By Chapter 6 the temple was rebuilt. By the Chapter 8 end, Ezra himself made it there and brought millions of dollars worth of stuff to be used at the temple for service. So what's the purpose of Chapters 9-10?
  - c) The answer is in effect is the next logical step we must do as Christians do once we accept Jesus as Lord and the one who paid the complete price for our sins. That's "separation". It is obviously my lesson title. My job's to now explain what "separation" means and what it does not mean. Yes that's the last two chapters in a nutshell and yes it's important for our Christian life to understand what "separation" means. Let's begin.
2. The idea of Christian separation doesn't mean we immediately divorce ourselves from everyone we know including our family members. The most important thing is about trying to live our life pleasing to God in all that we do. We can share our faith with our family members but if they are not receptive we're not to "force it down their throats". I would also say that if it's life threatening to reveal our faith, please don't. Let God guide us through such tough decisions.
  - a) So if it's ok to still say talk to our parents, spouses or children who are not believers, what does it mean to separate ourselves for God? It's to live for Him. It's to not make an effort to live in ways that are not pleasing to God. When we mess up and we all do, confess it as we move on. God doesn't expect perfection, but He does want an effort on our part to live as He desires. To explain this better let me describe what's going on in these chapters:
  - b) Ezra discovers that lots of the Israelites living there had intermarried with the pagans who worship other gods. The reason it's such a big deal is that is what got the Israelites kicked out of the land in the first place. What scholars suspect is the Israelites who returned from Babylon were still a minority and they wanted to be "just like everyone else"! Therefore it became common to intermarry with nonbelievers.
  - c) Paul clearly states that believers aren't to marry nonbelievers, but also preached that if we do, we should not divorce them (if the other partner agrees) if we become Christians. The point is made by Paul in 1st Corinthians Chapter 7. Yet we'll read here that Ezra tells the Israelites to separate themselves from their non-believing spouses. Isn't that contradictory to what Paul preached? The answer is "context". In Ezra's day it's about an effort to keep the Jewish community in tact for survival. In Paul's day, it's about leading a person to Jesus. Both are pro-marriage and trying to preserve the marriage concept. What Ezra cared about here were Israelites turning from God and not being influenced by deities their wives believed in. Scholars note that Ezra didn't use the standard Hebrew word for divorce. The implication is the Israelites in Ezra's day still "provided" for their ex's even though they did separate from their non-believing spouses and not live with them.
  - d) The point here is God desires we separate ourselves from nonbelievers in a way that our faith is a witness for Jesus. No we don't have to wear "I love Jesus" T-shirts. How we act's the key issue. That's the main idea behind separating ourselves for Jesus. Of course we're still till deal with nonbelievers but we should do it in a way where we are a good witness!

3. With all that said, let me see if I can summarize the chapters in a few paragraphs:
  - a) Chapter 9 opens with Ezra discovering the issue of Israelites not separating themselves as a community of believers for God. This isn't "Day 1" of his return. I suspect Ezra knew or suspected it was a problem talking to people. Essentially a few months after he got there is when he started dealing with it. He showed signs of grief and prayed to God as if he is part of the problem. There is a way of praying where one thinks "we all one community", so if there is a sin issue, then everybody is guilty. Ezra starts to name some of the people who live in the area as if to say, "Hey God, we were kicked out of this land for acting like all of those people, now many of the Israelites have inter-married with them. Realize that among the sins of those other nations is offering their children to their false gods. If you have read some of my Ezra lessons, you know this is a big deal! Anyway, Ezra made a very public humble appeal to God to deal with this issue.
  - b) Ezra discusses recent history in the fact the Persians let them return in spite of their sins of worshipping other gods. He goes back and forth discussing the Israelites problems and a bit of a history lesson. So why do this as opposed to "kicking butt and taking names"? Yes we'll read of Ezra dealing with individuals in Chapter 10, but before he gets into that, first Ezra realizes he needs to bring the issue to God and pray on behalf of those people as he's a priest and a leader in that community.
  - c) By Chapter 10, others noticed Ezra's public prayer and joined him. Then Ezra got down to business. First he dealt with the other leaders in the area. He then called an assembly of everyone in the Jewish community in that area. The bottom line is Ezra wanted to call out all the guilty people. In fact Ezra made it a death sentence not to show up at this meeting, so you know he was serious! In fact the second half of Chapter 10 is pretty much a list of all the names of people who did this. Does this mean they were going to hell? No, in fact, this is a list of people who've confessed their sins dealt with the issue and are now moving on with their lives. Still half a chapter to list all the names is "very Ezra". It's how his book ends. Now comes the fun part, explaining why these last two chapters are here.
4. Stop and consider that Ezra doesn't deal with murder, theft, the politics of the day, or any issue in that community. His main concern is the Israelites separating themselves for God. The joy that a priest gets is seeing people draw closer to God and turn from their sins. That's why the final half of Chapter 10 (final one) is in effect a list of those who've repented of their sins. Again the first thing that God desires once we give our lives to Him is to separate ourselves for Him. Yes we still have to deal with our families, friends, coworkers, etc. Being a Christian means we should desire every aspect of our lives is a witness for God. Will we mess up? Of course. Then we confess sin, turn from it, and make an effort once again, to live every aspect of our lives as a witness for Jesus.
  - a) These chapters also give great examples of good leadership when dealing with a problem in the church. First one prays about it. Then one confesses the sin. Then one deals with it and deals with the individuals responsible for it. I know Christians marrying unbelievers is a different issue than what Ezra dealt with here. Still it teaches us valuable lessons as to how we are to separate ourselves for God. That's why Ezra ends the way it does.
  - b) As we go through these chapters, I'll try to bring up issues related to separation. No, none of us are perfect and we each have issues we must deal with where we're not living as one "thinks" we should. I never claim perfection and I don't expect perfection out of anyone. I do desire that all believers use their lives as a witness for Jesus. It means different for each of us, but the goal is the same, using our lives as a witness for Him. When we mess up, we confess, turn, try to learn from our mistakes and move on. It doesn't matter how another's acting for Jesus. What matters is we make the effort. Being accountable to others, time in His word and prayer and realizing God is guiding us and judging our lives is a key factor in living the Christian life. OK, enough lecturing. Time to get started.
5. Oh, before I hit Verse 1, this is the last lesson in this book. That means I included a biography of the sources that I used. That's located on the last page of this lesson. With that said, let's begin:

6. Chapter 9, Verse 1: After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, "The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. <sup>2</sup> They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness."
- a) We have some sort of time gap between Chapter 8 and Chapter 9. I assume Ezra was busy setting up all the stuff he brought to Jerusalem. Now he finds out many Israelites living in that land were intermarrying with other people. Before I get into specifics, of these verses let me return to the issue of separating ourselves from non-believers. Why is it such a big deal? Shouldn't we be witnesses to nonbelievers? Of course. The issue about becoming a "single entity" with one, such as marriage or a business partner. The problem is if one in a relationship like that cares about pleasing God and the other one doesn't it will cause a lot of conflicts. Yes, I know there are "moral" nonbelievers out there. The issue is about using our lives to make a difference for Jesus. If our partners don't think that way it'll cause lots of conflicts. What about if we get saved after we're married? Paul discusses that. What is his point in effect is if the non-believing spouse wishes to stick it out, so be it. For what it's worth I've seen my share of marriages fall apart when one person is more committed than the other in such a relationship.
  - b) That leads us back to the Israelites. One has to understand this in context. The other gods in the area believed in sacrificing children to prove one's loyalty to God. Even if that isn't an issue, such marriages will be conflicted if one spouse wants to go "here" for church and the other wants to go "there" (places that don't honor our God!).
  - c) So what would motivate the Israelites to do this in the first place? My guess is they were a minority in number (those who cared about going to weekly service and honoring God as it was commanded in the Old Testament). As the Israelites intermingled with locals I am sure they started thinking, "he's cute or she's cute" and what's the big deal, so marriage in that area started to be a mixture of believers and nonbelievers. The reason it's such a big deal is first of all, that's how the Israelites got kicked out that land in the first place as His chosen started mixing worship of God with the other religions of the area. Ezra's thinking that this has to stop now or they'll be "out of there" again for not learning their lesson!
  - d) OK John, this would be interesting if I was married to someone who wasn't a believer. Do I really have to care about this stuff? Again one has to think in terms of "separation". We need to ask ourselves have we separated every aspect of our lives for God's use? No I am not saying we have to quit our jobs and go pass tracks out every day. I'm saying to live in a way that's separate for God means we think "biblically". We don't do things that violate His word. Then we're free to do what we want after that, but we think and live in terms of being a good witness for Him. That's what separation is all about.
  - e) All that lecturing leads me back to Ezra. He starts rambling off nations in the area. Many of them are nations God forbid the Israelites to intermingle with. He also mentions Egypt as well as the nations directly east of Israel (Moab, Ammon and Edom). Bottom line is we are reading about the Israelites failing to live separately from the rest of the community. I am not saying they can't intermingle socially or in business. I'm saying God calls on us to become "one" (marriage, business partnership) other with other Christians.
  - f) Ezra even singles out some of the leaders. If Ezra has been there for say a few months, did he not notice until now? It could be that he's met other leader's wives but it never dawned on him that the spouses were not believers in God. The point is he found out here, he's ticked off about and as we'll see in the next two chapters, "He name's names".
  - g) I should also state this is not a "blood line" thing that the Israelites were superior. Again it is a matter of separating ourselves for God's use and not becoming one (through marriage or business partnership) with people who's core values are different than ours.

7. Verse 3: When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled. <sup>4</sup> Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered around me because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles. And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice.
- a) It appears Ezra's first reaction to this problem was to "inflict pain upon himself". Yes it's a Jewish way of showing remorse. When he tore his clothes and even pulled out his hair, it was done in public to be noticed. The point is Ezra did a very public demonstration as to show people something's wrong and they need to pay attention to him. I suppose this is a better method than to start beating people up for marrying the wrong people!
  - b) Keep in mind that Ezra was still an "outsider" to the locals. Yes, he did lead a caravan that brought millions of dollars worth of stuff to Israel so he was a respected outsider. The act of remorse did get the attention of the people around him. Notice he didn't just start a big movement to get in people's faces, but in effect he just sat there contemplating what it did mean and the implications.
  - c) Think about this from a leadership aspect. Instead of just instantly raising a fuss, he first paused to consider the implications and probably what actions to take. The next step is to take it to God, which is what he did in Verse 5. (That's a big clue as to how we should act when we must deal with our own tough situations!)
8. Verse 5: Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the LORD my God <sup>6</sup> and prayed: "O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens. <sup>7</sup> From the days of our forefathers until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we and our kings and our priests have been subjected to the sword and captivity, to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings, as it is today.
- a) Let me set the scene. Ezra sat there for awhile with torn clothes and people watching his movements. He went on his knees and started praying. The prayer will run until the end of this chapter, so there's a lot to discuss about it.
  - b) First a word about how we pray. You can find scriptures where prayer was made on their knees. You can also find other prayers with people standing. When King Hezekiah was in a lot of pain, he prayed from his bed and got a response. (2nd Kings 20). My point is that it isn't how we pray (body position) as much as our sincerity that counts. Still I like "knees" as it is a great physical position of submission. To quote an old song, "You can't stumble when you're on your knees". Enough of that, back to the prayer itself.
  - c) The next thing to grasp is the "personal" aspect of his prayer. It's not, "God, please go wipe out the guilty but spare the innocent please". Instead it's "I'm guilty". The idea in effect is that if "one person sins, everybody sins". It's a combination of bearing responsibility as the leader as well as the fact that we are "one people" to God. So should we take responsibility for everyone else's sins? Yes and no. No we don't confess it as our sins, but we can say to God, "We as a congregation or we as a nation are guilty before You, make us aware of our sins and help us to turn from them". That's the flavor of this prayer.
  - d) Ezra was well aware that the reason the Israelites went into captivity was essentially for a large percentage of the Israelites turning to other gods or just going through the motions in worship and not putting their hearts into it. This is where separation is important. To not have the attitude that we have been separated for God's use, means we don't care who we marry as an example. If we care about pleasing God, we would want our marriage as well as our business relationships to be pleasing to Him as well. That's why "mixed marriages" (believers to nonbelievers) was a sin even in the New Testament. (See 2 Corinthians 6:14.)
    - i) Again, it's a separate issue over once you're already married. The New Testament essentially says to "hang around if possible to win" the spouse. As we'll read here in this lesson, they had a different issue and I'll discuss it later in this lesson.

- e) Meanwhile back to Ezra's prayer itself. The key point is that Ezra humbled himself as he knew that many of the Israelites living there were guilty of marrying nonbelievers. Ezra knew enough of their history over the last hundred years about why repentance of that is a key issue because the mix marriages leads to spouses and children turning to other gods for their lives. We'll get to how Ezra dealt with this problem later in the lesson.
9. Verse 8: "But now, for a brief moment, the LORD our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in his sanctuary, and so our God gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage. <sup>9</sup> Though we are slaves, our God has not deserted us in our bondage. He has shown us kindness in the sight of the kings of Persia: He has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins, and he has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem.
- a) Ezra knew he needed to appeal to God's grace before even dealing the problem itself. This part of the prayer even mentions God's grace (Verse 8) which proves His grace isn't just a New Testament thing! What's going on is Ezra knew that God was behind the movement to bring the Israelites back to the land. However, he was afraid that if a good percentage of the Israelites started turning to false gods or even if their children did, they'd be kicked out of there all over again. In effect, Ezra is stating that aspect of their recent history here in these verses.
- b) Gee John, this is interesting ancient history. However, assume we're not church leaders or assume that Christians marrying pagans is not a major issue we're facing. How should we apply this? First is when we're dealing with an issue of sin around us, start by asking for His grace to work His way over the situation. In these verses I'm sure Ezra knew God was already aware of all these things. Talking them out helps Ezra to contemplate the situation in terms of how God's grace would apply to this situation. For us, when problems occur I would also start with prayer and even state the facts to help us comprehend what is going to be the correct solution. As for a solution, pray our way through it, then as I love to say, do what's logical. It's amazing the good decisions we make if we don't panic and seek His guidance before doing so.
- c) Notice that Ezra is appealing to God not based on how good the Israelites are, but strictly based on His goodness. He's saying to God, "I know it was Your idea for us to be back in the land. I know there are Israelites who are messing up badly at the moment. As one of the leaders, I must take responsibility for what happens here. Therefore, give me wisdom to deal with all of this." That's Ezra's prayer to this point in a nutshell. Let's continue:
10. Verse 10: "But now, O our God, what can we say after this? For we have disregarded the commands <sup>11</sup> you gave through your servants the prophets when you said: 'The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruption of its peoples. By their detestable practices they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them at any time, that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it to your children as an everlasting inheritance.'
- a) The key point is Ezra is stating a law from Deuteronomy (7:3). It says in effect don't marry a person from another nation nor give your children in marriage to them. Keep in mind it is not implying that the Jewish people were superior. When God gives us a restriction on our life I promise it's for our own good. The other nations living in Israel at that time did things like offer their children as sacrifices to their gods to show their loyalty. These other gods also had sexual orgies to honor their gods. I'll just say it was all stuff that dishonors God and that's why it was forbidden.
- b) So where does one draw the line. For those of you who've seen "Fiddler on the Roof" the main character drew the line when his youngest daughter wanted to marry outside of the Jewish faith and "disowned" his daughter at that point in the story. To separate ourselves from nonbelievers is again the key issue here. Let me discuss a few things.

- i) First if our children already married a nonbeliever, we are to encourage them to be a witness to their spouse. God doesn't call Christians to divorce their spouses if the spouse is willing to stay with them. However, the New Testament definitely tells to not be "unequally yoked" with nonbelievers. (2 Corinthians 6:14).
  - ii) The point in Ezra's case is to be unequally yoked means the non-believing spouse may try to encourage the believing spouse to "try" pagan practices. That's why the Israelites were kicked out of the land less than a century earlier. My point is those two scriptures (Deuteronomy 7:3 and Corinthians 6:14) are not contradictory. The issue is different times and different circumstances. For example if one of children wants to marry someone who's a devout atheist, we may not disown them, but we would not exactly respect the marriage.
  - iii) While I'm taking on tough topics, what about same sex marriage? Why is it a sin in the bible? For starters, it violates the first bible commandment to Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply". In other words the human race can't continue unless it continues to produce children via male and female relationships. It's a complicated topic and involves a lot of issues. I have relatives and family friends who are part of that lifestyle. I'm kind to them and treat them nicely. But I still consider it a sin as both the Old Testament and New Testament clearly says so.
  - c) Meanwhile, we're still dealing with Ezra. He's dealing with Israelites who were marrying non-Israelites and it scared Ezra as it violated one of God's laws and was one reason why the Israelites were kicked out of the land not to long before he was around. Let's continue:
11. Verse 13: "What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet, our God, you have punished us less than our sins have deserved and have given us a remnant like this. <sup>14</sup> Shall we again break your commands and intermarry with the peoples who commit such detestable practices? Would you not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivor? <sup>15</sup> O LORD, God of Israel, you are righteous! We are left this day as a remnant. Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it not one of us can stand in your presence."
- a) Ezra's basically saying, "When the Israelites were kicked out the land, we almost died as a distinct entity". Now we as a nation are committing the same sin again. It'd be just of God to wipe us out once and for all! The point is Ezra is stating the nation's guilt before God in the form of prayer.
  - b) So why didn't he just say, "Let's round up the guilty, kill them off and the rest of us can be a witness for God". Let's be honest, if we killed everyone who every lived, none of us will be around very long. There has to be a balance and way to ask people to repent or else. I would say the "or else" would be banishment, but the first step is confrontation.
  - c) One of the biggest mistakes many churches make is not confronting sin when it occurs in that church. I recall many years ago when one of my church elders was guilty of an affair. Although it was public knowledge, no one called him out and he still attended church. It was eventually dealt with but the lack of church leadership was a problem. No we are not to "police the world" but we should police our own and deal with sin in our own churches so to speak. Paul did that in Corinthians (the first letter to them dealt with that issue) and we should do that in our churches. Again I'm not saying Christians have to be perfect. On the other hand when blatant sin exists, Jesus laid out a model for us to confront that sin in the church. (See Matthew 18:15-17).
  - d) My point is separation isn't just how we start our Christian life, it's also how we monitor it as living a separate life for Jesus. Does that mean that God can wipe out believers if we do to be a witness for Him? Yes I've seen ministers lose their life's work. Churches have gone as an entity when such issues are not confronted. Most of us who've been around awhile do see things like that on occasion. The point is "policing ourselves" is necessary and that is what Ezra is getting across in these verses.

- e) Ezra is basically saying God's laws stand "today" just as much as when they were written. He was referring to his time. That's why God wiped out the Israelite nation. It was only by His grace they even came back today. As for us Christians we use the New Testament to interpret the Old as I've been doing in this lesson so far!
  - f) So what does Ezra do next? Let's see.
12. Chapter 10, Verse 1: While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites--men, women and children--gathered around him. They too wept bitterly. <sup>2</sup> Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra, "We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel. <sup>3</sup> Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and of those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law. <sup>4</sup> Rise up; this matter is in your hands. We will support you, so take courage and do it."
- a) Let's be honest, if someone was in church with ripped clothes and was crying, people will gather around to see what's the matter and see if they can help. Apparently others found out what Ezra was complaining about and also joined in. Remember these are the leaders in Israel who cared about pleasing God and didn't want a "Babylonian Invasion Repeat".
  - b) Notice it wasn't Ezra's idea to put away the foreign wives. Verse 2 says "Elam" made that suggestion to Ezra. When we seek God in humble submission, God finds a way for us to deal with the issue in a way that's pleasing to Him.
  - c) The Hebrew word translated "send away" in Verse 3 is a different word than divorce. I'm suggesting that the men who took these foreign wives still divorced them but I suspect it's a matter of still providing for them as after all, some of them had children with them. It is not as simple as saying, "I divorce you you're on your own, good luck to you!" God wants us to take care of those we are responsible for even if they are not believers! Paul says that those who don't provide for their own family are worse than nonbelievers! (1st Tim. 5:8.)
    - i) I'm sure their own family includes those who aren't walking with God. My point's simply that separation from nonbelievers doesn't mean we're to not support them. I am saying there is a balance to be struck as we separate ourselves for God's use.
  - d) Anyway those people who were crying with Ezra reached an agreement that something is to be done to deal with this problem. We'll deal with that coming up next.
13. Verse 5: So Ezra rose up and put the leading priests and Levites and all Israel under oath to do what had been suggested. And they took the oath. <sup>6</sup> Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While he was there, he ate no food and drank no water, because he continued to mourn over the unfaithfulness of the exiles.
- a) My question of the moment, if the solution was found, why did Ezra continue to fast and pray and "mourn" over Israel? Why didn't he just say, "OK God we got a plan, bless it or block it" in effect? Part of it is I suspect it was Ezra's personality to keep seeking God for this issue. Part of it was Ezra had no idea what the results of this plan would be. He did not know if it would be accepted or rejected by the "congregation". For those who are in a leadership role, let's just say continuing effort to seek God's guidance even after a solution is agreed to, is always a good idea.
  - b) Anyway, time to implement the solution itself:
14. Verse 7: A proclamation was then issued throughout Judah and Jerusalem for all the exiles to assemble in Jerusalem. <sup>8</sup> Anyone who failed to appear within three days would forfeit all his property, in accordance with the decision of the officials and elders, and would himself be expelled from the assembly of the exiles.
- a) You want an incentive to comply with Ezra's request to give up pagan wives? How about losing everything you own if you don't show up. Realize the territory in question isn't all of Israel. It's essentially the land near Jerusalem that's in question as that's where they did live after they returned from Babylon. The "north" area is Samaritan country at this point.

15. Verse 9: Within the three days, all the men of Judah and Benjamin had gathered in Jerusalem. And on the twentieth day of the ninth month, all the people were sitting in the square before the house of God, greatly distressed by the occasion and because of the rain.<sup>10</sup> Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have been unfaithful; you have married foreign women, adding to Israel's guilt.<sup>11</sup> Now make confession to the LORD, the God of your fathers, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives."
- a) Bottom line the threat of losing everything they own worked. All those men who lived in the area agreed to show up. When Ezra explained the sin that was widespread there, he lays out the solution of separating themselves from the non-believing spouses.
  - b) Let's face it, this had to hit like a ton of bricks there. People knew it will be hard to do that in practical terms. However, believers understand that obeying God comes before any or all other issues and therefore we'll read of accepting this.
  - c) OK John, let's pause for a second. Does this mean I need to be the "sin police" and monitor what's going on in my church community? No. If we happen to here of an issue, then I'd say we use the Matthew 18:15-17 model as to how to deal with it. I'm well aware none of us are perfect and we all have our demons to battle. The point is we shouldn't just say it's the way I am everyone must deal with it. We're to battle our sin nature. Not to earn our way into heaven. The issue is about being a good witness for Jesus and that's why we do battle those issues. Separating ourselves for God doesn't mean we're perfect, but it means we are to fight our sin nature and do our best to live as God intends us to live.
  - d) Anyway, speaking of separating ourselves from sin, the Israelites agreed to do all of that!
16. Verse 12: The whole assembly responded with a loud voice: "You are right! We must do as you say.<sup>13</sup> But there are many people here and it is the rainy season; so we cannot stand outside. Besides, this matter cannot be taken care of in a day or two, because we have sinned greatly in this thing.<sup>14</sup> Let our officials act for the whole assembly. Then let everyone in our towns who has married a foreign woman come at a set time, along with the elders and judges of each town, until the fierce anger of our God in this matter is turned away from us."<sup>15</sup> Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah, supported by Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite, opposed this.
- a) Back in Verse 9, the text said this took place in the 9<sup>th</sup> month. That's roughly December. If you have ever been to Israel, that's usually the peak of the rainy season. Jerusalem is 2,500 feet above sea level and it's not as "desert" as say being next to the Red Sea. My point is it's a season of rain. Verse 9 even mentioned it was raining! Imagine a big bunch of men that are standing out in the open rain listening to Ezra speak. It was probably cold. They were probably thinking, "Whatever you say Ezra, just let us get out of this rainy weather!"
  - b) Notice it wasn't "Everybody get divorced and that's that". The text implies a time window where the Israelites were individually judged. I'm sure the leaders went from one family to the next to ask the wives if they believed God alone as God and dealt with it.
  - c) Verse 15 mentions two people opposed to this plan. It can either mean they didn't want to divorce their wives or they wanted the judgment done a different way. Therefore it wasn't 100% agreement on this plan, but only a few who said no. Bottom line the plan was going to happen to individually test all the Israelites marriages. My guess is everyone was tested as to not exclude any families.
17. Verse 16: So the exiles did as was proposed. Ezra the priest selected men who were family heads, one from each family division, and all of them designated by name. On the first day of the tenth month they sat down to investigate the cases,<sup>17</sup> and by the first day of the first month they finished dealing with all the men who had married foreign women.
- a) Time for a quick lesson on the Hebrew calendar. To calculate the religious holidays, New Year's was technically in the spring. However, most of us know the Jewish New Year is a fall holiday. In effect there are two new years. The fall one is used to mark the beginning of a new year and the spring one is used to calculate holidays. Anyway, the 9<sup>th</sup> month is when the rainy meeting took place and on the "First month" the judgment was all done!



- b) I have to admit, from here to the end of the chapter, it gets boring. Essentially all it is, is a list of names of those who've sinned this way and those who repented.
  - c) No I don't think there is a quiz on this list when we get to heaven. I think they are listed as a sign that the Israelites did deal with the situation.
  - d) Keep in mind this is not a list of "shame on you". This is a list of those who repented here! None of us are without sin. Therefore, I read all these names as people who repented! Let us begin as I'll go through this fairly quickly:
18. Verse 18: Among the descendants of the priests, the following had married foreign women: From the descendants of Jeshua son of Jozadak, and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib and Gedaliah. <sup>19</sup> (They all gave their hands in pledge to put away their wives, and for their guilt they each presented a ram from the flock as a guilt offering.) <sup>20</sup> From the descendants of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah. <sup>21</sup> From the descendants of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel and Uziah. <sup>22</sup> From the descendants of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad and Elasa.
- a) The first thing to realize here is the problem wasn't just with the "common folks", we get a bunch of names of priests who were guilty of doing this.
  - b) So if these priests cared about pleasing God and knew their bible, why did they do this? I am asking about their motivation. What I suspect is those Israelite were still a minority in that community and instead of marrying each other, they looked "outside" in order to be accepted in that community!
  - c) The good news is these priests were willing to "step up to the plate" and be an example to the rest of the community.
  - d) The text mentions a ram was offered as a guilt offering for each of them. Why a ram? In the book of Genesis when an animal was offered up by Abraham instead of Isaac, it was a ram that was used. Anyway, a ram is associated with being a "substitute" as an offering to God and stuck that way. For us Christians Jesus paid the complete price for sins which is why we don't do animal sacrifices. Now you know.
  - e) Again, don't look at all these people as sinful beyond repair! All of us sin. These are men who realized they messed up, repented and took action to deal with it.
19. Verse 23: Among the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (that is, Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah and Eliezer. <sup>24</sup> From the singers: Eliashib. From the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem and Uri.
- a) The next category is the other people who helped in worship of God. Notice there were a lot less of them than the priests. I don't know if that's a sign of anything but the list of the guilty are a lot shorter here.
  - b) Now for the long list. I'll give the rest of the chapter in one big paragraph:
20. Verse 25: And among the other Israelites: From the descendants of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malkijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malkijah and Benaiah. <sup>26</sup> From the descendants of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth and Elijah. <sup>27</sup> From the descendants of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad and Aziza. <sup>28</sup> From the descendants of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai and Athlai. <sup>29</sup> From the descendants of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal and Jeremoth. <sup>30</sup> From the descendants of Pahath-Moab: Adna, Kelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui and Manasseh. <sup>31</sup> From the descendants of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, <sup>32</sup> Benjamin, Malluch and Shemariah. <sup>33</sup> From the descendants of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh and Shimei. <sup>34</sup> From the descendants of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, <sup>35</sup> Benaiah, Bedeiah, Keluhi, <sup>36</sup> Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, <sup>37</sup> Mattaniah, Mattenai and Jaasu. <sup>38</sup> From the descendants of Binnui: Shimei, <sup>39</sup> Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, <sup>40</sup> Macnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, <sup>41</sup> Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, <sup>42</sup> Shallum, Amariah and Joseph. <sup>43</sup> From the descendants of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel and Benaiah. <sup>44</sup> All these had married foreign women, and some of them had children by these wives.
- a) First, realize this is how the book of Ezra ends, with a list of names of people found guilty of being married to a pagan wife.

- b) So why list all these names in the bible? What's the deal? So we can make fun of them if we meet them in heaven? Hardly!
  - c) I suspect the reason Ezra ended his book this way is to say in effect, "Hey the temple has been rebuilt so we can be united as a people to worship God, and the people did separate themselves for the purpose of serving Him". That in effect is what God desires of as His people: We realize Jesus is God, we accept His free payment for all of sins, and then we're to live a live "separated" from nonbelievers as a witness for Him. Yes I'm well aware that we must deal with family and friend situations with nonbelievers. We all have to do that. So how do we separate ourselves in practice? It begins with an attitude. It's to realize we are to make decisions based on how God sees them. I'm aware that most decisions we do make in life are not "biblical" decisions but simply practical ones. In such cases we are to live simply by thinking what's the logical thing to do next, do our best to seek His will as we trust He's guiding our lives.
  - d) That in effect is why Ezra ended the way it does. Here are a whole bunch of Israelites who care deeply about their relationship with God to the point of separating themselves from a martial relationship! It's the idea of God first and everything else second. I won't go over the whole New Testament thing again about martial relationships with nonbelievers as it has been beaten to death in this lesson so far. I'll just say that God cares much more to our relationship than just our salvation. He cares about us being a good witness for Him and that means separating ourselves not only from sinful activities but even from the activities that can lead to problems down the road. It simply comes down to what is first in our life, God or something else? Yes it's lifelong process to deal with sin and it never ends. Still, it is the desire of God for us to draw close to Him in every aspect of our lives. It begins with a desire to separate ourselves from the "world" to be of use to Him. That's what these last two chapters of Ezra deal with.
  - e) Therefore, the specific details about these Israelites 2,500 years ago are not as important as our relationship to Him. What God desires is separation from nonbelievers (in whatever form that means in practicality of our lives at the moment) right now. If you get that, you get the purpose of this lesson and a big step toward drawing closer to God.
  - f) With that said, I thank you for reading my series on Ezra. I'll close in prayer. On the next page is my bibliography that I used in preparation for these lessons. Thanks as always for reading. OK, enough stalling, time to close in prayer:
21. Heavenly Father, first we thank You that you've separated us to have an eternal relationship with You. You didn't just save us so we can be with You in heaven forever. You saved us so we can be a witness to You to the world around us. May Your Spirit guide us to show us areas of our life where we haven't fully separated our lives for You. Guide us so we can make a difference for You in our lives. Make it obvious to us anything we need to do to change our lives to be a better witness for You. Guide us as we use our lives for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen

## Supplement: Bibliography

"If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." (Isaac Newton)

Without prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all these commentaries are useless. My prayer as I prepare these lessons was for God to show me the things He wanted me to learn, and second, the lessons He wanted me to pass on in my writings. I have quoted many sources throughout these lessons. If any of these writers appeal to you, I invite you to read or listen to them further via the places listed below. I have also quoted other sources not listed, and those names are usually listed in the lessons. These other authors were usually quoted from the materials listed below and taken from those sources.

First and foremost, the greatest commentary on the bible is the bible itself. Here are the bible versions I use in preparation of my lessons. I mostly quote The New International Version (NIV), Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society; The New King James Version (NKJV), Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.; The King James Version (KJV) (no copyright on that version); the English Standard Version. (ESV). The copyright information for the ESV is in point #7 below. The Living Bible (TLB) Copyright © 1971, 1986 by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189; "The Message" copyright © 1993 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved. All the bible text used in these lessons (except the ESV) is taken from Parsons Software: Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1999, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved and from Zondervan Reference Software (32-bit edition) Version 2.6, Copyright © 1989-1998 The Zondervan Corporation.

Here are the commentaries I have referenced over these lessons. The specific commentaries on Ezra are listed first, and then bible-wide commentaries. They're listed in alphabetical order by author. References to audio commentary means the information was gathered via the Internet in MP3® Format, unless otherwise stated:

1. Commentary on Ezra by Jon Courson. It is in book form from Harvest House Publishing. It is also available in MP3® format at <http://www.joncourson.com/>.
2. Commentary on Ezra by Bob Davis. They are available for free in MP3® format at <http://northcountrychapel.com/studies/>.
3. Commentary on Ezra by David Guzik. It is available for free in audio and text format. The web address is [http://www.enduringword.com/library\\_commentaries.htm](http://www.enduringword.com/library_commentaries.htm) Mr. Davis quotes a lot of famous authors from the 19th and 20th Century on these books and I've used some of those quotes.
4. The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah by J. Charles Fensham (Part of the NIV Commentary on the Old Testament). 1982, Wm. B. Eerimans Publishing Company. Available via Amazon and other book stores.
5. The English Standard Version Study Bible; Copyright (2005-2009) The Standard Bible Society. The version itself is copyrighted 2008 by Crossway Bibles, a publication of "Good News Publishers".
6. The Expositor's Bible Encyclopedia, Zondervan Publications, (via CD-ROM 1998 release). This is a multi-volume encyclopedia with notes on every bible verse. It is available through Zondervan. Paperback books are published on individual Bible books from this same source.
7. The Life Application Bible, Zondervan Publishing: [www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm](http://www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm).
8. The MacArthur Study Bible with commentary by John MacArthur Nelson Bibles (1997) ISBN: 0849912229.
9. I also refer sometimes to J.P. Moreland apologetic ministry which is at [www.jpmoreland.com](http://www.jpmoreland.com) and Greg Koukl's apologetic ministry, which is Stand to Reason at [www.str.org](http://www.str.org) I also quote from Dennis Prager on many Jewish issues. He is a nationally syndicated radio broadcaster. See [dennisprager.com](http://dennisprager.com).
10. My apology if I have quoted someone else and I have forgotten to include them in this list.
11. Also grateful for "Google" and "Wiki" web site to look up specific facts stated in these lessons.