

## February 20

**Scriptures:** Read Ezra 9 & 10

**Key Verse:** “Now therefore, make confession to the Lord God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives.”  
(Ezra 10:11)

### Overview

After Ezra arrived in Jerusalem and joyously offered sacrifices unto the Lord, he was suddenly struck with much grief as he heard about the problem of pagan intermarriage among the people of God. This sad report was told to him by those who had not transgressed by taking pagan wives and who were desiring purity. It had been about half a century earlier, at the time of the Temple’s completion and dedication, that the children of Israel were careful to separate themselves from “the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the Lord God of Israel” (6:21). Over the years, however, they had grown cold in their relationship with God and were living in disobedience to Him. Satan could not stop the children of the Lord from building the Temple, so in a subtle, more dangerous way, he crept into their lives. A sin such as mixed marriage was very dangerous indeed, for if it was allowed to continue, the Jews would have been led into idolatry and would have been assimilated into the pagan nations — thus no longer a distinct people. Ezra was God’s man of the hour to bring them to repentance and preserve the “holy seed” (cf. Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 4:3) from which would come the promised Messiah.

Ezra expressed his grief and moral indignation by tearing his clothes and plucking out parts of the hair on his head and beard. This reaction, which sprang from his love and concern for the people, had more of an effect on them than would anger and force, for many were convicted of their sin. Since Ezra’s life was a good example, (he practised what he preached, 7:10), the people listened to him with respect.

At the evening sacrifice, he fell before the Lord, poured himself out in prayer, and interceded on behalf of the Israelites. He expressed to God that they, including himself, were all unworthy sinners before the righteous and holy God. He confessed the nation’s guilt, which had caused the captivity in the first place. Now they were once again in breach of the covenant and deserving punishment — but for the mercy of God. Israel’s sin was clear to Ezra because he had a thorough knowledge of the Mosaic Law, which repeatedly warned them to keep separate from the unclean nations, including a strong prohibition against heathen intermarriage (cf. Deuteronomy 7:1-7). To be a pure nation consecrated to God, they had to remain separate from the heathen nations and were not to compromise with the world (cf. 1 Peter 2:9). They, like believers today, were not to love the world nor the things of the world, but rather to love to do the will of God, which brings eternal rewards (1 John 2:15-17).

Even the priests and leaders had married idolatrous wives! They certainly had no excuse. Priests were to enforce and teach the Law; therefore, they especially should have set good examples. Moses had specifically instructed the priests concerning the type of wife they were to have; a noble, pure Israelite woman. By intermarriage with the heathen, the priest would “profane his

posterity among his people”, since they would no longer be sanctified unto the Lord (Leviticus 21:7, 13-15).

It may seem harsh that all the foreign wives and their children were to be “put away” (10:3; Deuteronomy 24:1), but this was essential for Israelite posterity. As Shechaniah said: “yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this.” It was not too late to do something about it, but the solution caused much sadness for the community and, of course, for those wives and children involved.

As Shechaniah was aware, Ezra had the responsibility and legal authority from Artaxerxes to enforce his suggestion (10:4, 7:26). He also had the authority as a priest, as well as a higher commission from God, a much higher power than Artaxerxes. Ezra was anxious to bring reformation, and he called an immediate national gathering. The punishments of confiscation of property and excommunication would be inflicted upon those who failed to appear. Within three months, the task was completed. Israel was now safe from this attack of Satan against her. Ezra had paved the way for revival in Israel, which could come only after confession of sin (in this case, it was a public confession) and obedience to God in the separation from that which is not pleasing to Him (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

### **Prayer**

Lord, we confess our sin and trust Your promise of forgiveness. Please keep us pure before You, O Lord, and help us to turn away from sin of any kind.