

# Adult Bible Class

## The Book of Ezra - Lesson 3

### October 8, 2023

There were three key leaders from Babylon (Persia) in Jerusalem during the reconstruction era. Zerubbabel (who was descended from King David and King Jehoiachin) led the first group to return and rebuild the Temple (Ezra 3:8), Nehemiah led the rebuilding of the walls (Nehemiah 1, 2), and Ezra led in restoring true worship of the God of Israel (Ezra 7).

The book of Ezra continues the story that ended with the book of 2 Chronicles. King Cyrus of Persia issued a decree permitting the Jews in his kingdom to return to Jerusalem after 70 years of captivity. Zerubbabel (the appointed governor) and Jeshua (the high priest) are the main characters of Ezra chapters 1 - 6, where the rebuilding of the Temple is described. The returned Jewish exiles faced much opposition from the current residents of the land as they tried to rebuild the Temple of God in Jerusalem. The Second Temple was finally completed in 516 B.C. - twenty-one years after the initial work began. It did not compare to the First Temple - Solomon's Temple - but it was joyously dedicated to the glory of God.

Ezra chapter 7 continues the story of the Jewish exiles. There are 60 years separating the events of Ezra 6 and Ezra 7. The ruler of Persia in chapter 7 is King Artaxerxes, the successor to Xerxes (Ahasuerus) who married Esther (the events of the book of Esther took place in time between Ezra chapters 6 and 7).

## Ezra Chapter 7

### Ezra Arrives in Jerusalem

**Ezra 7:1 (NLT)** Many years later, during the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia, there was a man named Ezra. He was the son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, **2** son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, **3** son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, **4** son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, **5** son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the high priest.

Ezra was a descendant of Aaron (the first high priest) and Seraiah (the last high priest before the captivity).

**6** This Ezra was a scribe who was well versed in the Law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given to the people of Israel. He came up to Jerusalem from Babylon, and the king gave him everything he asked for, because the gracious hand of the Lord his God was on him. **7** Some of the people of Israel, as well as some of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and Temple servants, traveled up to Jerusalem with him in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes' reign.

Ezra was not a part of the first return to Jerusalem. This was many decades later.

A scribe in those days was an expert in the Law of Moses. The duty of a scribe was to preserve the Word of God, teach the Word of God, and interpret and apply the Word of God.

**Ezra 7:8** Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in August of that year. **9** He had arranged to leave Babylon on April 8, the first day of the new year, and he arrived at Jerusalem on August 4, for the gracious hand of his God was on him. **10** This was because Ezra had determined to study and obey the Law of the Lord and to teach those decrees and regulations to the people of Israel.

The distance from Babylon to Jerusalem is about 500 miles as the crow flies, but about 900 miles traveling along the Euphrates River and then heading south. Though most of the captives remained in Babylon (Persia), some did go to the land of their ancestors. Zechariah 2:7 says, *Up, Zion! Escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon.*

### **Artaxerxes' Letter to Ezra**

**11** King Artaxerxes had given a copy of the following letter to Ezra, the priest and scribe who studied and taught the commands and decrees of the Lord to Israel:

**12** "From Artaxerxes, the king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the teacher of the law of the God of heaven. Greetings.

**13** "I decree that any of the people of Israel in my kingdom, including the priests and Levites, may volunteer to return to Jerusalem with you. **14** I and my council of seven hereby instruct you to conduct an inquiry into the situation in Judah and Jerusalem, based on your God's law, which is in your hand. **15** We also commission you to take with you silver and gold, which we are freely presenting as an offering to the God of Israel who lives in Jerusalem.

**16** "Furthermore, you are to take any silver and gold that you may obtain from the province of Babylon, as well as the voluntary offerings of the people and the priests that are presented for the Temple of their God in Jerusalem. **17** These donations are to be used specifically for the purchase of bulls, rams, male lambs, and the appropriate grain offerings and liquid offerings, all of which will be offered on the altar of the Temple of your God in Jerusalem. **18** Any silver and gold that is left over may be used in whatever way you and your colleagues feel is the will of your God.

**19** "But as for the cups we are entrusting to you for the service of the Temple of your God, deliver them all to the God of Jerusalem. **20** If you need anything else for your God's Temple or for any similar needs, you may take it from the royal treasury.

King Artaxerxes was very generous to Ezra. Apparently, the kings of those days sought the favor of the various gods of the peoples that they conquered. This king wanted the favor of the God of Judah, so he sent gold, silver, and items needed for sacrifice with Ezra and his group.

**21** "I, Artaxerxes the king, hereby send this decree to all the treasurers in the province west of the Euphrates River: 'You are to give Ezra, the priest and teacher of the law of the God of heaven, whatever he requests of you. **22** You are to give him up to 7,500 pounds of silver, 500 bushels of wheat, 550 gallons of wine, 550 gallons of olive oil, and an unlimited supply of salt. **23** Be careful to provide whatever the God of heaven demands for his Temple, for why should we risk bringing God's anger against the realm of the king and his sons? **24** I also decree that no priest, Levite, singer, gatekeeper, Temple servant, or other worker in this Temple of God will be required to pay tribute, customs, or tolls of any kind.'

The priests and Temple workers were given tax-exempt status.

**25** "And you, Ezra, are to use the wisdom your God has given you to appoint magistrates and judges who know your God's laws to govern all the people in the province west of the Euphrates River. Teach the law to anyone who does not know it. **26** Anyone who refuses to obey the law of your God and the law of the king will be punished immediately, either by death, banishment, confiscation of goods, or imprisonment."

## Ezra Praises the Lord

**Ezra 7:27** Praise the Lord, the God of our ancestors, who made the king want to beautify the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem! **28** And praise him for demonstrating such unfailing love to me by honoring me before the king, his council, and all his mighty nobles! I felt encouraged because the gracious hand of the Lord my God was on me. And I gathered some of the leaders of Israel to return with me to Jerusalem.

It was God who moved the heart of the king to support the building in Judah and the restoration of the worship of Israel's God.

## Ezra Chapter 8

### Exiles Who Returned with Ezra

**Ezra 8:1 (NLT)** Here is a list of the family leaders and the genealogies of those who came with me from Babylon during the reign of King Artaxerxes:

**2** From the family of Phinehas: Gershom.

From the family of Ithamar: Daniel.

From the family of David: Hattush, **3** a descendant of Shecaniah.

From the family of Parosh: Zechariah and 150 other men were registered.

**4** From the family of Pahath-moab: Eliehoenai son of Zerahiah and 200 other men.

**5** From the family of Zattu: Shecaniah son of Jahaziel and 300 other men.

**6** From the family of Adin: Ebed son of Jonathan and 50 other men.

**7** From the family of Elam: Jeshaiah son of Athaliah and 70 other men.

**8** From the family of Shephatiah: Zebadiah son of Michael and 80 other men.

**9** From the family of Joab: Obadiah son of Jehiel and 218 other men.

**10** From the family of Bani: Shelomith son of Josiphiah and 160 other men.

**11** From the family of Bebai: Zechariah son of Bebai and 28 other men.

**12** From the family of Azgad: Johanan son of Hakkatan and 110 other men.

**13** From the family of Adonikam, who came later: Eliphelet, Jeuel, Shemaiah, and 60 other men.

**14** From the family of Bigvai: Uthai, Zaccur, and 70 other men.

The glamour and excitement that surrounded the first return to Jerusalem (with a descendant of David leading them) had faded because of all the trouble and opposition that first group met. Now, 60 years later, a new group was forming to go to Jerusalem to encourage devotion to the God of the land.

### Ezra's Journey to Jerusalem

**15** I assembled the exiles at the Ahava Canal, and we camped there for three days while I went over the lists of the people and the priests who had arrived. I found that not one Levite had volunteered to come along. **16** So I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, who were leaders of the people. I also sent for Joiarib and Elnathan, who were men of discernment. **17** I sent them to Iddo, the leader of the Levites at Casiphia, to ask him and his relatives and the Temple servants to send us ministers for the Temple of God at Jerusalem.

**18** Since the gracious hand of our God was on us, they sent us a man named Sherebiah, along with eighteen of his sons and brothers. He was a very astute man and a descendant of Mahli, who was a descendant of Levi son of Israel. **19** They also sent Hashabiah, together with Jeshaiah from the descendants of Merari, and twenty of his sons and brothers, **20** and 220 Temple servants. The Temple servants were assistants to the Levites—a group of Temple workers first instituted by King David and his officials. They were all listed by name.

Ezra had the authority from the king - and he had the money and treasures - but now he needed people! A call was made for Levites (authorized Temple

workers), and the call was answered by Sherebiah and his relatives, along with other Levites.

**Ezra 8:21** And there by the Ahava Canal, I gave orders for all of us to fast and humble ourselves before our God. We prayed that he would give us a safe journey and protect us, our children, and our goods as we traveled. **22** For I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to accompany us and protect us from enemies along the way. After all, we had told the king, "Our God's hand of protection is on all who worship him, but his fierce anger rages against those who abandon him."

Ezra had previously expressed great confidence in the protecting power of his God. Therefore, he did not ask the king for an escort of soldiers. Ezra did need protection. The route was dangerous because of robbers - and they were transporting a huge amount of valuables (millions of dollars worth). Ezra relied on the God of Israel for his protection.

**23** So we fasted and earnestly prayed that our God would take care of us, and he heard our prayer.

**24** I appointed twelve leaders of the priests—Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten other priests— **25** to be in charge of transporting the silver, the gold, the gold bowls, and the other items that the king, his council, his officials, and all the people of Israel had presented for the Temple of God. **26** I weighed the treasure as I gave it to them and found the totals to be as follows:

24 tons of silver,  
7,500 pounds of silver articles,  
7,500 pounds of gold,

**27** 20 gold bowls, equal in value to 1,000 gold coins,  
2 fine articles of polished bronze, as precious as gold.

**28** And I said to these priests, "You and these treasures have been set apart as holy to the Lord. This silver and gold is a voluntary offering to the Lord, the God of our ancestors. **29** Guard these treasures well until you present them to the leading priests, the Levites, and the leaders of Israel, who will weigh them at the storerooms of the Lord's Temple in Jerusalem." **30** So the priests and the Levites accepted the task of transporting these treasures of silver and gold to the Temple of our God in Jerusalem.

The valuables were divided among a group of priests. It was up to each one to keep and protect the valuables assigned to him on the journey.

**31** We broke camp at the Ahava Canal on April 19 and started off to Jerusalem. And the gracious hand of our God protected us and saved us from enemies and bandits along the way. **32** So we arrived safely in Jerusalem, where we rested for three days.

The four month journey was completed. God kept and protected both them and their silver and gold.

**33** On the fourth day after our arrival, the silver, gold, and other valuables were weighed at the Temple of our God and entrusted to Meremoth son of Uriah the priest and to Eleazar son of Phinehas, along with Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui—both of whom were Levites. **34** Everything was accounted for by number and weight, and the total weight was officially recorded.

The Babylonians were noted for keeping excellent records. Perhaps Ezra was required to send an accounting back to the king.

**35** Then the exiles who had come out of captivity sacrificed burnt offerings to the God of Israel. They presented twelve bulls for all the people of Israel, as well as ninety-six rams and seventy-seven male lambs. They also offered twelve male goats as a sin offering. All this was given as a burnt offering to

the Lord. **36** The king's decrees were delivered to his highest officers and the governors of the province west of the Euphrates River, who then cooperated by supporting the people and the Temple of God.

## Ezra Chapter 9

### Ezra's Prayer concerning Intermarriage

**Ezra 9:1 (NLT)** When these things had been done, the Jewish leaders came to me and said, "Many of the people of Israel, and even some of the priests and Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the other peoples living in the land. They have taken up the detestable practices of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites. **2** For the men of Israel have married women from these people and have taken them as wives for their sons. So the holy race has become polluted by these mixed marriages. Worse yet, the leaders and officials have led the way in this outrage."

Ezra had come to encourage the people and teach the Law of Moses. He had brought silver and gold for the Temple of God. But after the accounting of the treasures some very grave and distressing news came to him. The spiritual condition of the people was not good - they had not separated themselves from the idol worshiping people of the land. Many of them had married wives who were idol worshipers. This would affect every aspect of their lives. It was not an ethnic problem, but a religious problem. By marrying idol worshipers, they would become idol worshipers themselves - it was only a matter of time. God had warned the children of Israel before they entered the Promised Land:

**Exodus 34:15 (NLT)** "You must not make a treaty of any kind with the people living in the land. They lust after their gods, offering sacrifices to them. They will invite you to join them in their sacrificial meals, and you will go with them. **16** Then you will accept their daughters, who sacrifice to other gods, as wives for your sons. And they will seduce your sons to commit adultery against me by worshiping other gods.

**Deuteronomy 7:1** "When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are about to enter and occupy...**2** When the Lord your God hands these nations over to you...Make no treaties with them and show them no mercy. **3** You must not intermarry with them. Do not let your daughters and sons marry their sons and daughters, **4** for they will lead your children away from me to worship other gods. Then the anger of the Lord will burn against you...

It is shocking that the people who would not allow the Samaritans to help them build the Temple just a generation later intermarried with them and the other pagan peoples of the area. And worst of all, the "leaders and officials" were doing the same thing. They were "leading" the people in this sinful behavior. Were God's people incapable of learning from past experience? Were they not taken captive to Babylon because of their continued idol worship?

**Ezra 9:3** When I heard this, I tore my cloak and my shirt, pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat down utterly shocked. **4** Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel came and sat with me because of this outrage committed by the returned exiles. And I sat there utterly appalled until the time of the evening sacrifice.

**5** At the time of the sacrifice, I stood up from where I had sat in mourning with my clothes torn. I fell to my knees and lifted my hands to the Lord my God. **6** I prayed,

"O my God, I am utterly ashamed; I blush to lift up my face to you. For our sins are piled higher than our heads, and our guilt has reached to the heavens. **7** From the days of our ancestors until now, we have been steeped in sin. That is why we and our kings and our priests have been at the mercy of the pagan kings of the land. We have been killed, captured, robbed, and disgraced, just as we are today.

Ezra says, "our sins," and "our guilt." Though he had just arrived from Babylon (Persia), he shared this iniquity with the people of the land. Somehow he was bound together with his people, and he interceded for them.

**Ezra 9:8** "But now we have been given a brief moment of grace, for the Lord our God has allowed a few of us to survive as a remnant. He has given us security in this holy place [NKJV: a peg in His holy place]. Our God has brightened our eyes and granted us some relief from our slavery. **9** For we were slaves, but in his unfailing love our God did not abandon us in our slavery. Instead, he caused the kings of Persia to treat us favorably. He revived us so we could rebuild the Temple of our God and repair its ruins. He has given us a protective wall in Judah and Jerusalem.

God had been good to His people, even though they had abandoned and forsaken him. God allowed a remnant to return and rebuild the Temple, the walls of Jerusalem, and the city. He gave them a place in his plan for them. He gave them a small measure of revival so they could go forward. But now...

**10** "And now, O our God, what can we say after all of this? For once again we have abandoned your commands! **11** Your servants the prophets warned us when they said, 'The land you are entering to possess is totally defiled by the detestable practices of the people living there. From one end to the other, the land is filled with corruption. **12** Don't let your daughters marry their sons! Don't take their daughters as wives for your sons. Don't ever promote the peace and prosperity of those nations. If you follow these instructions, you will be strong and will enjoy the good things the land produces, and you will leave this prosperity to your children forever.'

**13** "Now we are being punished because of our wickedness and our great guilt. But we have actually been punished far less than we deserve, for you, our God, have allowed some of us to survive as a remnant. **14** But even so, we are again breaking your commands and intermarrying with people who do these detestable things. Won't your anger be enough to destroy us, so that even this little remnant no longer survives?

No excuses, no explanations. There really aren't any. But the first step is facing the problem and acknowledging it. Then, something can be done.

**15** O Lord, God of Israel, you are just. We come before you in our guilt as nothing but an escaped remnant, though in such a condition none of us can stand in your presence."

## Ezra Chapter 10

### The People Confess Their Sin

**Ezra 10:1 (NLT)** While Ezra prayed and made this confession, weeping and lying face down on the ground in front of the Temple of God, a very large crowd of people from Israel—men, women, and children—gathered and wept bitterly with him.

We understand that Ezra was not praying privately, but in public where the people could see the depth of his sorrow and intercession. Because Ezra prayed a heartfelt prayer, the people were convicted of their sin, and they sorrowed with him. Repentance was needed, and Ezra led the people to repent.

**2** Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, a descendant of Elam, said to Ezra, "We have been unfaithful to our God, for we have married these pagan women of the land. But in spite of this there is hope for Israel.

**Ezra 10:3** Let us now make a covenant with our God to divorce our pagan wives and to send them away with their children. We will follow the advice given by you and by the others who respect the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law of God. **4** Get up, for it is your duty to tell us how to proceed in setting things straight. We are behind you, so be strong and take action."

Shecaniah understood the seriousness of their sin, yet there was hope. The Spirit of God had moved upon them to repent. Shecaniah then gave a course of action - they must divorce their pagan wives.

We must understand that God hates divorce. The prophet of God during the time of Nehemiah was Malachi. He wrote:

**Malachi 2:10** Are we not all children of the same Father? Are we not all created by the same God? Then why do we betray each other, violating the covenant of our ancestors?

**11** Judah has been unfaithful, and a detestable thing has been done in Israel and in Jerusalem. The men of Judah have defiled the Lord's beloved sanctuary by marrying women who worship idols.

**12** May the Lord cut off from the nation of Israel every last man who has done this and yet brings an offering to the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

**13** Here is another thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, weeping and groaning because he pays no attention to your offerings and doesn't accept them with pleasure. **14** You cry out, "Why doesn't the Lord accept my worship?" I'll tell you why! Because the Lord witnessed the vows you and your wife made when you were young. But you have been unfaithful to her, though she remained your faithful partner, the wife of your marriage vows.

**15** Didn't the Lord make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth.

**16** "For I hate divorce!" says the Lord, the God of Israel. "To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife."

The Israelites were divorcing their faithful Jewish wives and marrying idol worshiping pagan wives. The situation was a mess.

There were certain unions that were unlawful to the ancient Israelite. They were not to marry close relatives. They were not to marry an idol worshiper. Marriage to an idol worshiper was strictly forbidden.

**Ezra 10:5** So Ezra stood up and demanded that the leaders of the priests and the Levites and all the people of Israel swear that they would do as Shecaniah had said. And they all swore a solemn oath.

**6** Then Ezra left the front of the Temple of God and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. He spent the night there without eating or drinking anything. He was still in mourning because of the unfaithfulness of the returned exiles.

Ezra fasted from both food and water. The situation was very serious.

**7** Then a proclamation was made throughout Judah and Jerusalem that all the exiles should come to Jerusalem. **8** Those who failed to come within three days would, if the leaders and elders so decided, forfeit all their property and be expelled from the assembly of the exiles.

**9** Within three days, all the people of Judah and Benjamin had gathered in Jerusalem. This took place on December 19, and all the people were sitting in the square before the Temple of God. They were trembling both because of the seriousness of the matter and because it was raining. **10** Then Ezra the priest stood and said to them: "You have committed a terrible sin. By marrying pagan women, you have increased Israel's guilt. **11** So now confess your sin to the Lord, the God of your ancestors, and do what he demands. Separate yourselves from the people of the land and from these pagan women."

**Ezra 10:12** Then the whole assembly raised their voices and answered, "Yes, you are right; we must do as you say!" **13** Then they added, "This isn't something that can be done in a day or two, for many of us are involved in this extremely sinful affair. And this is the rainy season, so we cannot stay out here much longer. **14** Let our leaders act on behalf of us all. Let everyone who has a pagan wife come at a scheduled time, accompanied by the leaders and judges of his city, so that the fierce anger of our God concerning this affair may be turned away from us."

**15** Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah opposed this course of action, and they were supported by Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite.

**16** So this was the plan they followed. Ezra selected leaders to represent their families, designating each of the representatives by name. On December 29, the leaders sat down to investigate the matter. **17** By March 27, the first day of the new year, they had finished dealing with all the men who had married pagan wives.

### **Those Guilty of Intermarriage**

**18** These are the priests who had married pagan wives:

From the family of Jeshua son of Jehozadak and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah.

**19** They vowed to divorce their wives, and they each acknowledged their guilt by offering a ram as a guilt offering.

**20** From the family of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah.

**21** From the family of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah.

**22** From the family of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah.

**23** These are the Levites who were guilty: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (also called Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

**24** This is the singer who was guilty: Eliashib.

These are the gatekeepers who were guilty: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

**25** These are the other people of Israel who were guilty:

From the family of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malkijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Hashabiah, and Benaiah.

**26** From the family of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah.

**27** From the family of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza.

**28** From the family of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai.

**29** From the family of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth.

**30** From the family of Pahath-moab: Adna, Kelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh.

**31** From the family of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, **32** Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah.

**33** From the family of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei.

**34** From the family of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, **35** Benaiah, Bedeiah, Keluhi, **36** Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, **37** Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu.

**38** From the family of Binnui: Shimei, **39** Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, **40** Macnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, **41** Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, **42** Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph.

**43** From the family of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah.

**44** Each of these men had a pagan wife, and some even had children by these wives.

This last verse lets us know that there were few children born of these unions. The pagan wives were sent away with the children - no doubt with financial support.



A similar situation has faced some missionaries in Africa and places where polygamy is practiced. The missionaries were faced the problem of righting the wrong of polygamy after conversion. Usually the remedy was for the man to keep his first wife and send the others away (with financial support) to live their lives separated from their husband. It is a situation that requires tough decisions (and much prayer) to make things right before God.

The Jewish exiles had sinned greatly by divorcing their good Jewish wives and taking pagan wives (idol worshipers). They needed to make things right by sending away the pagan wives and returning to their Jewish wives who worshiped God. The passage at the end of chapter 10 lists over 100 men who vowed to divorce their pagan wives. They were prominent men - priests (even relatives of Jeshua, the high priest), Levites, a singer, gatekeepers, and others. They needed to make things right so they could carry out their duties with God's favor and blessing. Apparently, these pagan wives were unwilling to become worshipers of the God of Israel. Because of this, the marriages were unlawful in the sight of God (Israelites were only to marry worshipers of God). Though this resolution to divorce their pagan wives may seem harsh or strange to our modern ears, yet in this time period and in this situation, God sanctioned this course of action.

In the New Testament, marriage to an unbeliever is condemned:

**2 Corinthians 6:14 (NKJV)** Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? **15** And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? **16** And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

"I will dwell in them  
And walk among *them*.  
I will be their God, And they shall be My people."

**17** Therefore "Come out from among them, And be separate, says the Lord.  
Do not touch what is unclean,  
And I will receive you."

However, Paul admonished a believer who is already married to an unbeliever to remain in the marriage if at all possible.

**1 Corinthians 7:12** But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. **13** And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. **14** For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. **15** But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. **16** For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save *your* husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save *your* wife?