

Ezra:

Working together in God's service



**Class 6: We must provide an
inheritance for our children**



Today we look at 2 tough issues:

1. Marriage to unbelievers
2. Divorce



My Goal Today:

- **Help you understand** how the people of Ezra's day solved their problem – I will not tell you what to do!
- **This should help us in making decisions** with our problems today

Remember: God may be more interested in how we behave while solving our problems than the end result!

The Problem Revealed

Ezra 9:1-4

1 When these things were done, **the leaders came to me**, saying, "**The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands**, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. 2 **For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands.** Indeed, **the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass.**" 3 So when I heard this thing, **I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished.** 4 Then **everyone who trembled** at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

1st Step: Acknowledge the Problem

1) Acknowledge the Problem and openly discuss



- **Officials approach Ezra (9:1)**
 - Indicates Ezra has become a spiritual leader
 - Ezra has wisdom and authority
- **People – Priests – Levites:** problem throughout Israel!
 - May have resulted from Gentiles who were attracted back in Ezra 3 and 6
 - Some Jews then took Gentile wives who were not believers

**Communication is a key to all
family & ecclesial problems**



Holiness: they had not separated themselves

HOLINESS TO THE LORD



- **Ex 22:31** “Be you holy for I am holy”
- **Lev 11-22** Clean/unclean, defilement – God tried to impress the people

You shall be holy, for I the Lord
your God am holy (Lev 19:2)

We are training to join God's heavenly family

God Expects & Demands Holiness

Leviticus 20:24-26

24 'But I have said to you, "You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey." I am the LORD your God, **who has separated [badal] you from the peoples.**

25 '**You shall therefore distinguish [badal] between** clean animals and unclean, between unclean birds and clean, and you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by bird, or by any kind of living thing that creeps on the ground, which **I have separated [badal] from you as unclean.**

26 '**And you shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy,** and **have separated [badal] you from the peoples,** that you should be Mine.

We must distinguish between good & bad

The Problem Revealed

2 Corinthians 6:17-18

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

18 "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

This is not just an OT concept!

The Problem Revealed

Deuteronomy 7:1-3

1 "When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the **Hittites** and the **Girgashites** and the **Amorites** and the **Canaanites** and the **Perizzites** and the **Hivites** and the **Jebusites**, seven nations greater and mightier than you, 2 "and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. **You shall make no covenant with them** nor show mercy to them. 3 "**Nor shall you make marriages with them.** You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son.

This was the principle

Applying the principles

- **Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians**
 - not specifically mentioned in Deut 7
 - Principle was extended to apply
 - Legalists would have claimed it did not apply!
- **Lesson:** learn principles & apply them in faith
 - Adam to Eve: “neither shall you touch it”
 - If wrong to murder, then wrong to hate in heart
 - If wrong to commit adultery, then wrong to look & lust

**Look for ways to apply God's principles –
don't condense them to letter of the Law**



Ezra's Prayer for Help

Ezra 9:5-9

5 **At the evening sacrifice** I arose from **my fasting**; and having **torn my garment** and my robe, **I fell on my knees** and **spread out my hands to the Lord my God**. 6 And I said: "O my God, **I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You**, my God; **for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens**. 7 Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as it is this day. 8 And now for a little while grace has been shown from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage. 9 **For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia**, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem.

We have failed, God is faithful & merciful

Ezra's Prayer for Help

Ezra 9:10-15

10 And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? **For we have forsaken Your commandments,** 11 which You commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their impurity. 12 Now therefore, **do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons; and never seek their peace or prosperity,** that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your children forever.' 13 And after all that has come upon us **for our evil deeds and for our great guilt,** since **You our God have punished [exercised restraint toward us more] us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such deliverance as this,** 14 should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor? 15 O Lord God of Israel, You are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day. Here we are before You, **in our guilt,** though no one can stand before You because of this!"

Acknowledged the guilt of Sin

Extent of the Problem



- **They have taken wives** for themselves and their sons
 - Elders have tremendous responsibility to live by God's standard
 - Children learn from parents, so parents must live by God's standard
- **Holy race has mixed itself:** divided loyalties & interests
 - Talk to folks who have unbelieving spouses & discover the tough decisions they face
 - Have someone share the issue with your CYC
- **Note:** mixed marriages & idolatry that followed were what caused the exile (v.14)
 - **Fear of punishment** is not a powerful, long-run motivation
 - **Must learn to love the Lord our God** with all our heart, soul, strength & mind (Mat 22:37; Deut 6:5), develop a relationship

Ecclesial elders & Parents must lead!

Ezra's Prayer (9:6-15)

- Begins with humility (v.6)
- Confession of sin (v.7)
- God's kindness & mercy (v.8)
- Purpose of Freedom: build temple (9)
- Acknowledged Peoples' failure (v.10)
- God warned of the danger (v.11)
- God commanded separateness (v.12)
- Not punished as sins deserve [mercy] (v.13)
- If break commands, there will be no remnant (v.14)
- God is just, no one is righteous (v.15)



Great leaders identify with the peoples' sin & plead for God's help to recover

Ezra's Response

Ezra 10:1-5

1 Now while Ezra was **praying**, and while he was confessing, **weeping**, and **bowing down before the house of God**, a **very large assembly of men, women, and children** gathered to him from Israel; for **the people wept very bitterly**. 2 And **Shechaniah the son of Jehiel**, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, "**We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this**. 3 Now therefore, let us **make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them**, according to the advice of my master and of **those who tremble at the commandment of our God**; and let it be done **according to the law**. 4 Arise, **for this matter is your responsibility**. **We also are with you**. **Be of good courage, and do it.**"

5 Then Ezra arose, and **made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word**. So **they swore an oath**.

The People supported the proposed solution

Admitting the Problem (Ezra 10)

- **Pray, confessing, weeping (v.1):** talking to God, admitting community sins, demonstrating sincerity
- **Rent garments, mantle, pull out hair (v.3)**
 - Some think Ezra over-reacted, but he was terrified about the future of God's ecclesia
 - This issue had led to the captivity in the first place, and the death of Ezra's Dad (Seraiah)
- **All who trembled at God's word (v.4)**
 - They were concerned about the future
 - Note how the faithful were attracted to Ezra
- **Evening sacrifice (v.5):** time of continual burnt offering – time for dedication!



This is true Leadership

Finding a Solution (Ezra 10)

- **Ezra's sincerity**, commitment & example cause others to join (v.1)
- **Before the house of God**: Note Solomon's prayer in 1Kgs 8:30,35 "when they pray toward this place"
- **People wept bitterly**: Not a sign of weakness, but a part of confession & true repentance
- **Shecaniah (v.2)**: his Dad (Jehiel) has a foreign wife (v.26), but he's still willing to deal with the problem
- **There is hope**: he knew about God's great mercy when there is true repentance

**Ezra's leadership caused Shecaniah
to rise to the occasion**

Ezra's Approach to Mistakes:



- 1) **Publicly acknowledge the issue is wrong** and mistakes have been made (9:3)
- 2) **Think about what we have done** and the consequences of our mistakes (9:4)
- 3) **Pray:** admit mistakes and ask for God's mercy and help (9:5-15)
- 4) **Consider possible plans to move forward** to correct the mistake (10:1-4)
- 5) **Implement the plan,** trusting in God to bless the efforts (10:5-44)

Similar strategy used by Joshua for solving the Gibeonite mistake in Joshua 9

Ezra Distributes the Plan

Ezra 10:6-8

6 Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and **went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib**; and when he came there, **he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity.**

7 And they issued a **proclamation** throughout Judah and Jerusalem **to all the descendants of the captivity, that they must gather at Jerusalem**, 8 and that whoever would not **come within three days**, according to the instructions of the leaders and elders, all his property would be confiscated, and he himself would be separated from the assembly of those from the captivity.

**Ezra pressured the community
to get involved in the solution**

Asking everyone to be part of the Solution

- **“Be courageous (strong) & do it” (10:4)**
from 1Chr 28:10 David to Solomon
- **Ezra made them swear on oath (v.5)**
 - Asa (2 Chr 15:12-14) Hezekiah (2 Chr 29:10)
 - Josiah (2 Chr 34:31-32)
 - Nehemiah (Neh 5:12 restore land, no interest) 10:29 (put away foreign wives)
- **Chamber (v.6):** in side of temple (1Kgs 6:5)
 - Eliashib = high priest in Neh 3:1
 - No bread or water: Ezra willing to make personal sacrifices for sake of community
- **Within 3 days (v.8):** no one lived more than 3 days away
 - Note: Ezra’s authority & willingness to make demands



Go forward, trusting God

A circular arrangement of hands of various skin tones, symbolizing unity and teamwork. The hands are stacked in a circle, with each hand resting on the arm of the person next to it. The skin tones range from light to dark, representing diversity. The background is plain white.

**Unity is promoted when
one person does not
dominate, but instead gets
everyone gets involved**

The Community Assemblies

Ezra 10:9-11

9 So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth of the month; and all the people sat in the open square of the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of heavy rain. 10 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. 11 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."

A clear solution: Separate from
Canaanites AND pagan wives

We are in this world, but not of it

John 17:13-17

13 But now I come to You, and **these things I speak in the world**, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because **they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world**. 15 **I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one**. 16 **They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world**. 17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

This world is the arena where God trains us to battle Sin, but we cannot join it!

**AND DO NOT BE
CONFORMED
TO THIS WORLD,**

**BUT BE
TRANSFORMED
BY THE RENEWING OF YOUR MIND,
THAT YOU MAY PROVE WHAT IS
THAT GOOD AND ACCEPTABLE
AND PERFECT WILL OF GOD.**

ROMANS 12:2

Solution: Divorce the foreign wives

who were not committed to Yahweh



- **Put away (v.3):** same Hebrew word as in Deut 24:2
 - Some Christadelphians claim these men only “lived with” these foreign women, but did not marry them or divorce them
 - However, these foreign women were taken as wives in Ezra 9:2 (compare Deut 7:3; Gen 34:9) & as acknowledged by Ezra in 9:12 – that’s why the solution was so difficult to implement
- **Wives & their children** = wives & children who still lived as foreigners (worshipped idols)
 - **In Neh 13:24**, where this occurs again, the children did not know the Hebrew language
 - Maybe this became a test of the commitment of the foreign wives to Yahweh
- **Note: this was not a simple solution of demanding every foreign wife be divorced.**
 - Some foreigners had joined Israel & participated in the Passover back in Ezra 6:21
 - This was a selective process & took 3 months to implement

Good solutions take time and involve examining each case

Don't marry Canaanites (Unbelievers)

Deuteronomy 7:1-5

1 "When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, **seven nations greater and mightier than you**, 2 and when the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you **shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them.** 3 **Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son.** 4 **For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly.**

They will lead your children astray!

Divorce affects our Children

Malachi 2:13-16

13 And this is the second thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and crying; so **He does not regard the offering anymore**, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands.

14 Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because **the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth**, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

15 But did He not make ~~them~~ one, having a remnant of the Spirit? **And why one? He seeks godly offspring.** Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

16 "For the LORD God of Israel says that **He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence**," says the LORD of hosts. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

Marriage was designed to teach us Godly principles and help us raise Godly children

Principles Involved in the Law used by Ezra:



- 1) **Separate ourselves to God – “be you holy”:**
don’t marry unbelievers: (Deut 7:1-5)
- 2) **Marriage should be for life** (Gen 2:24, Mat 19:8) Divorce was permitted (Deut 24:2), but not the Divine ideal! “for the hardness of your hearts” (Mat 19:8)
- 3) **God wants us to raise Godly children, so he “hates divorce”** (Mal 2:15) – but these families were not Godly & not raising Godly children!

The challenge of living the Truth is to weigh up all the principles, and then prayerfully choose a pathway that attempts to faithfully follow God's way and works to help and support our members & their families

Paul's marriage counsel in 1 Corinthians 7



v.12-14 If an unbeliever is willing to stay, then give it a try. Who knows, maybe the unbeliever will be won over to God.

v.15 If an unbeliever departs (not interested), let them go. God has called us to peace! (note: this only works if the believer is walking with God!)

There wouldn't be peace if an unbelieving spouse taught our children another language and how to worship another god!

Marriage Relationship is not always the primary Issue



- 1) **Abraham divorced Hagar & disowned Ishmael** [*“take your son, your only son”*] because *“it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.”* (Rom 9:16-17)
- 2) **Master/slave relationship rated higher** than marriage (Ex 21:1-11)
- 3) **Marriage to ungodly unbelievers** who brought evil practices into the family (Ezra 10:11, 19, 44; Neh 13:23-27)
- 4) **Converts to Christ whose spouses desired to leave the marriage.** Converts were *“not under bondage”* because *“God has called us to peace”* (1Cor 7:12-16)

When Biblical principles conflict, we have to wisely rank them according to God's ways

Conflicting Principles in the Bible:

We have to make a choice!



Sabbath **OR** Circumcision on 8th day

Sabbath **OR** Priests' daily temple work

Showbread rules **OR** David's men need food

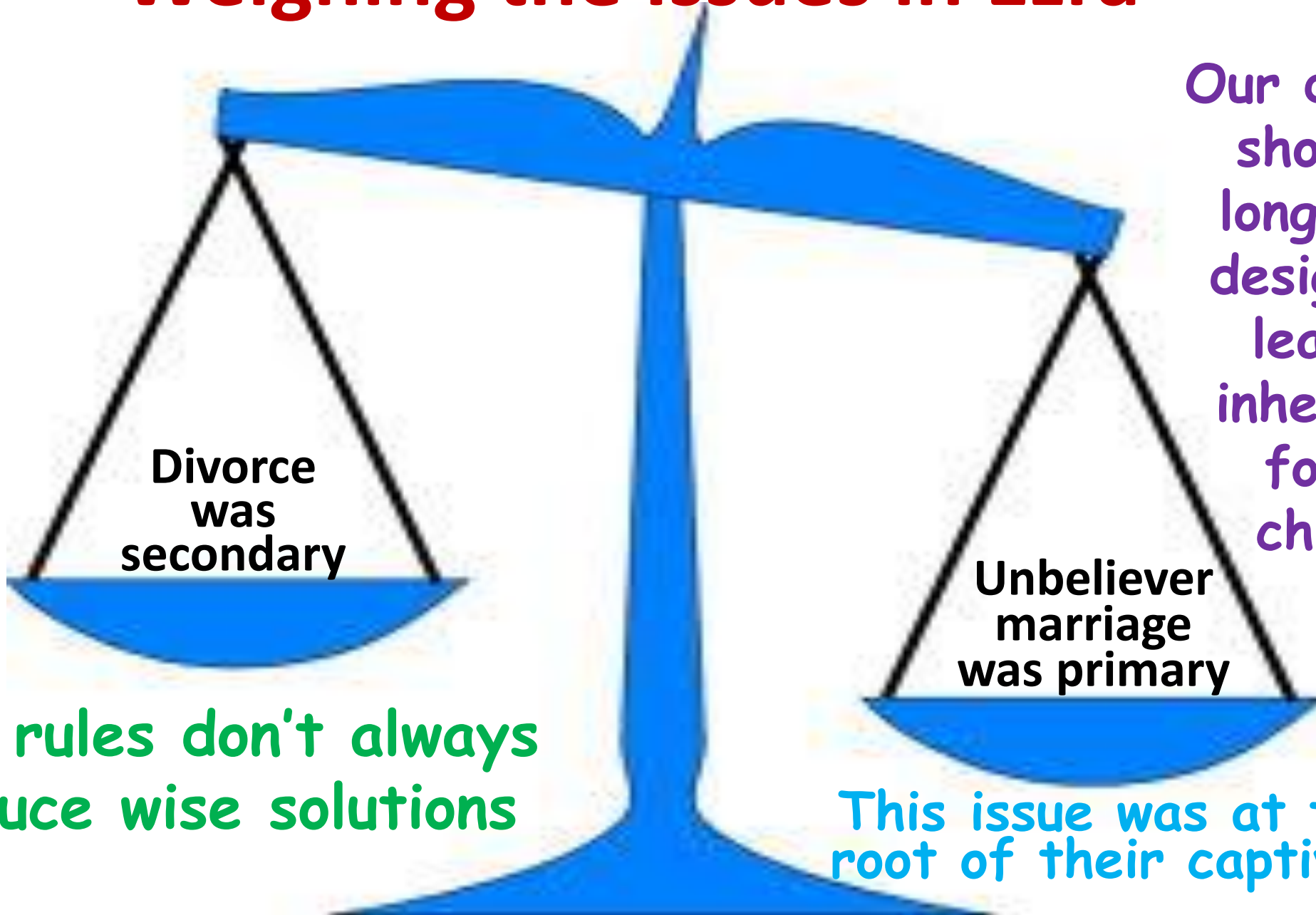
Gibeonites should die **OR** faithfulness to covenant

God hates divorce **OR** Holiness to God

"Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath"

These are the issues that help us learn to live like God

Weighing the Issues in Ezra



Our decisions
should be
long-term,
designed to
leave an
inheritance
for our
children

Rigid rules don't always
produce wise solutions

This issue was at the
root of their captivity

Solving Ecclesial Problems sometimes involves weighing the issues:

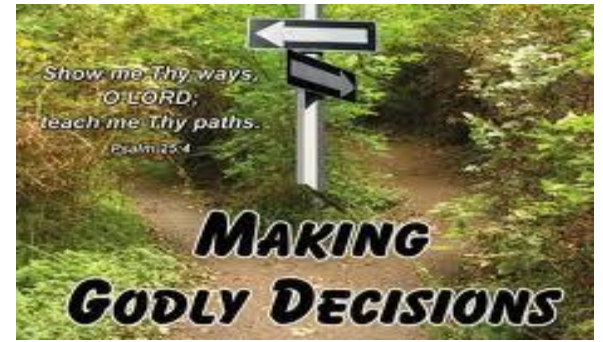
- 1) **Lev 10:** Eleazar & Ithamar burned the goat
- 2) **Acts 15** Problem of fellowshiping Gentiles
- 3) **Joshua 9** Covenant with the Gibeonites
- 4) **Num 27 & 36** Daughters of Zelophehad's inheritance [*daughters only get land, then must marry in the tribe*]
- 5) **1 Sam 14** Jonathan breaks Saul's oath & eats some honey
- 6) **John 8** Jesus' handling of the adulterous woman



God has given us examples in the Bible so we can use them as patterns to solve our problems

Conflicting principles in Christ

We have to make a choice!



Use freedom to eat
meat offered to idols

OR

Try not to cause
others to sin

Exercise liberties
we have in Christ

OR

Through love serve
one another

Carry out judgments
against one another

OR

Extend God's
mercy to others

The choices we make reveal our
understanding of God's character

They agree with the solution!

Ezra 10:12-17

12 Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, "Yes! As you have said, so we must do. 13 But there are many people; it is the season for heavy rain, and we are not able to stand outside. Nor is this the work of one or two days, for there are many of us who have transgressed in this matter. 14 Please, let the leaders of our entire assembly stand; and let all those in our cities who have taken pagan wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and judges of their cities, until the fierce wrath of our God is turned away from us in this matter." 15 Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite gave them support.

16 Then the descendants of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain heads of the fathers' households, were set apart by the fathers' households, each of them by name; and they sat down on the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. 17 By the first day of the first month they finished questioning all the men who had taken pagan wives.

This involved 3 months of investigations!

**Why did it take
3 months?**



Those who had Pagan Wives

Ezra 10:18-44

18 And among the **sons of the priests who had taken pagan wives** the following were found of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brothers (**high priest family - 4**): Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. 19 **And they gave their promise that they would put away their wives; and being guilty,** they presented a ram of the flock as their trespass offering.

20 (**Other priests - 13**) Also **of the sons of Immer**: Hanani and Zebadiah; 21 of the **sons of Harim**: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, **Jehiel**, and Uziah; 22 of the **sons of Pashhur**: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah.

23 **Also of the Levites (6)**: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (the same is Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

24 **Also of the singers (1)**: Eliashib; and **of the gatekeepers (3)**: Shallum, Telem, and Uri. more →

All these leaders agreed to divorce

Other Israelites who had Pagan Wives

Ezra 10:18-44

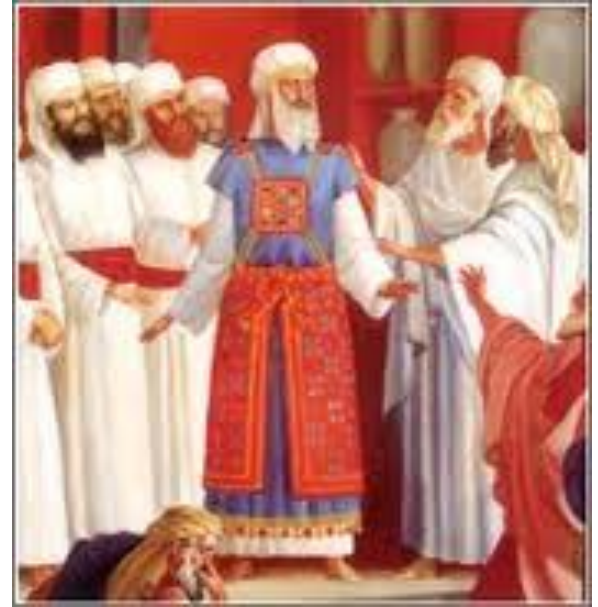
25 **And others of Israel - 86:** of the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, Jeziah, Malchiah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malchijah, and Benaiah; 26 of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Eliah; 27 of the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza; 28 of the sons of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai; 29 of the sons of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Ramoth; 30 of the sons of Pahath-Moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh; 31 of the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, 32 Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah; 33 of the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei; 34 of the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, 35 Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluh, 36 Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, 37 Mattaniah, Mattenai, Jaasai, 38 Bani, Binnui, Shimei, 39 Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, 40 Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, 41 Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, 42 Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph; 43 of the sons of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah.

44 **All these had taken pagan wives,** and some of them had wives by whom they had children.

Total of 113 cases out of 50,000 men

The Result: 113 divorced families

- **Took 90 days (v.16):** didn't rush through in 1 week
 - Probably gave foreign women an opportunity to convert
 - Note: no women married foreign men
- **Total in the list: 113 men**
 - 4 of High priest's family
 - 10 Levites
 - 13 of other priests
 - 86 common Israelites
- **Indicates problem was spread through community, but not very many had to divorce in the end**
 - Low percentage of men – only 0.3%
 - Much lower than our community today
 - 27 priests & Levites: *Leaders were the worst offenders!*



**Maybe Ezra's reaction was based
on the failure of the Leaders**

Ezra's success based on:

- 1) Admitted the problem existed
- 2) Identified with the people: *"our iniquities"*
- 3) Prayed to God for help
- 4) Let people develop a solution
 - It was not Ezra's idea forced on the community
- 5) Got most people to agree with plan
- 6) Took the time to examine each case.
 - Did not enforce a blanket rule!



**This problem & solution is in
the Bible to help us today**

As we return home...



Remember: Grandpas & Grandmas, Dads & Moms, Aunts & Uncles, AB's, S.S. teachers, CYC

You set the standards for your families & ecclesias. So pray for God's wisdom! Study & then do it & teach it!

Look to the future! Make tough decisions today for sake of your children and grandchildren, so you can leave them a Godly inheritance in a united community!

Pray for God's help & blessing: Unless the Lord builds the house we labor in vain (Psa 127:1)

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 Jn 4 NIV)

Lessons from This Class

- Community & individual failures will happen – admit we are all part of the problem & pray for solutions
- Seek the wisdom of God & involve our families & ecclesias in finding a solution – then get many involved.
- Our solutions must be designed around God's holiness and what will be helpful for families to achieve that holiness.
- Move forward in faith – God will help solve the problem
- Solutions can encourage many to make wise, spiritual decisions about their lives
- God is involved and will prosper your efforts