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10 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. ²And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, *one* of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, "We have trespassed^a 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. ³Now 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. ⁴Arise, for *this matter is your responsibility*. We also *are* with you. Be of good courage, and do *it*."
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1. Guilt, conviction, & call to action

- a. Ezra's grief over the Jews marrying pagan women is great
 - a1. Ezra cried out in anguish & laid prostrate on the ground, confessing to the Lord
 - a2. The Jews gathered around & began to also weep & take on themselves the shame that Ezra felt
- b. Instead of imposing penalties on the people, the people demanded that Ezra take action
 - a1. He was to command that the pagan wives & by implication, their children, be put away
 - a2. The correction for sin is to remove the sin
- c. Removing sin is not so easy when others are involved
 - a1. Sin always impacts others
 - a2. Gen. 2:24-25 marriage is supposed to be a lifelong covenant between spouses
 - a3. Dt. 24 divorce was possible, but only due to the hardness of man's heart
 - a4. Mal. 2:13-16 God hates divorce
 - a5. Jud. 2 God had warned Israel that if they did not wipe out the people of the land, they would become a snare to them
- d. Battling principles
 - a1. Marriage is both a permanent sacred covenant (Gen. 2) & impermissible with pagans for Israel
 - a2. To undo a marriage is a violation of God's law, but to be in a pagan marriage was also sin

2. A covenant to undo a covenant (10:5-11)

- a. Ezra sent out a decree that everyone would have to gather in Jerusalem in 3 days or have their property ceased

- a1. A strong arm gov. tactic from authority given to Ezra by the king (Ez. 7)
 - a2. Government, having superior authority & power, is able to impose its will on its citizens (subjects)
 - b. This was during the rainy season (Nov./Dec.) & the meeting was in the open courtyard on the west side of temple
 - c. The people agree to put away their pagan wives
 - a1. No mention in the text that God commanded Ezra to do this or if God approved of it
 - a2. There is no provision made for the care of the divorced wives or the children
 - b1. Abraham had sent Hagar & Ishmael away in the wilderness with a day's worth of bread & water
 - b2. It is presumed that they would return to their families
 - d. Moral conflict is difficult
 - a1. Ex. 2 the midwives lied to save the boy babies
 - a2. Jos. 2 Rahab lied to save the spies
 - a3. 1 Sam. 16:1-2 Samuel is told to not tell Saul that he was going to Bethlehem to anoint a new king
 - a4. Jer. 38 Jeremiah withheld truth from the nobles
 - e. Was divorcing the pagan wives the lesser of 2 evils?
3. Implementation (10:12-17)
- a. The people agreed to divorce their pagan spouses
 - a1. They asked for more time since it was the rainy season & the procedure took time
 - a2. A schedule was drawn up to complete the process in a few months
 - b. Ezra lists the leading men who had married foreign wives & who agreed to divorce them
 - c. Several issues arise concerning this procedure:
 - a1. The process was initiated by Ezra's emotional response to the pagan marriages
 - a2. Compliance was made under the threat of property confiscation
 - a3. The divorces were part of a mass movement
 - a4. Hearts were not completely turned to the Lord, for Nehemiah dealt with this issue, as well as Sabbath Day violations, withholding of tithes, pagan priests, & enslavement of fellow Jews
 - d. Emotional responses & mass commitments rarely last
 - e. Divorcing pagan wives may have been right, but also it was superficial (cleaning closet, but not the heart)