

INTRODUCTION / QUESTIONS / COMMENTS

- **Illus #1** – You find out that your Dad is growing Pot in the corn field. Do you expose the situation or keep quiet?
- **Illus #2** – 2 living together w/ his & her kids. 1 adult comes to Christ and wants to live right. What counsel do we give?
 - ♦ Can we explain God’s perfect will vs His permissive will?
 - ♦ Is there one solution for all, or is each situation unique?
- What has precedence? Our will or God’s? Compassion or Mercy? Obedience or Sacrifice? Severity or Leniency?
- Support of Godly Leaders - God expects us to support the leaders He provides wholeheartedly – but not blindly
 - Accountability is a must for all – including for leaders
 - E.g., During apostate times one may take his tithe away from the temple/church and give it to someone doing God’s work (i.e., Elisha)..... **2King 4:42-44**

LESSON PLAN.....Following Godly Spiritual Leaders

- 1) **Ezra comes to town**..... **Ch 7**
 - a) Ezra – a skilled scribe from the line of Zadok .. **vv2,6,10**
 - i) Only line of priests who remained faithful
 - ii) Having a head knowledge of God’s word is not enough. Must live it & share it. Doers vs Hearers
 - b) **Ezra’s Leadership Qualities:** Knowledgeable and seasoned in God’s word, stern/severe, compassionate, encourager, identifies w/ the people (this is our problem); listens to sound advice from others, decisive, and able to act courageously [able to stand in the gap]
- 2) **Ezra’s Entourage** **Ch 8**
 - a) Ezra arrived 58 years after the temple was completed
 - b) Ezra’s journey of 800 miles took 4 months (~10mi/day)
 - c) God’s providential care of Ezra’s entourage was not automatic, but was directly related to Ezra’s decisions
 - i) God could’ve protected Ezra w/out prayer, but He delights answering even the obvious**Zech 10:1**
 - d) Leadership accountability**8:24-34**
- 3) **National Crisis – Mixed Marriages** **Ch 9**
 - a) The rededication of the temple and restoration of traditions did not enable the people to stay close to God - Something else was needed – personal commitment
 - b) History was about to repeat itself, so drastic action was needed to prevent another national annihilation
 - i) 110/50,000 ~ 0.2% (equiv to 1 person out of 500)
 - ii) The severity of the sin necessitated the presence of all to confess, repent, investigate and act**10:6-8**
 - iii) Israel was under a Land covenant w/ God
 - iv) Marriages to idolatrous/immoral spouses violated this covenant because it polluted the land and the holiness of God’s people**Eze 36:18**
 - v) If no repentance, national annihilation was the only fix for idolatry/immorality.....**Eze 23:46-49**
 - vi) Also due to national sin, gladness and joy are cut off from the house of God**Joel 1**
 - (1) Why go to God’s house if it’s not enjoyable?
 - vii) Marriage to a believing non-Israelite was OK
 - (1) Joseph married an Egyptian **Gen 41:45***
 - (2) Boaz married Ruth (Moabite)**Ruth 1:4; Mt 1:5**
 - (3) Moses married a Midianite and an Ethiopian/Cushite**Num 12:1**
 - (4) Salmon married Rahab (a Caananite Prostitute)**Josh 6:25; Mt 1:4,5**

- c) Separating from an unbelieving spouse is not fully applicable to us **1Cor 7:10-15;39-40**
 - i) Marriage to an unbelieving spouse, though, detrimental in some regards, is not a national crisis for NT believers as it was for OT Israel
 - ii) UNLESS, they were shacking up (i.e., not married) - Why is marriage so important? (Vow to God & to each other, public testimony, to be protected by all for couple’s sake and for society’s sake)
- d) **Married** ~ lit. dwell with [03427 (bvy) yashab]; 1088x
 - i) AV-dwell 437x, inhabitant 221, sit 172, abide 70, inhabit 39, down 26, remain 23, in 22, tarry 19, set 14, continue 5, place 7, still 5, taken 5, misc 23
 - ii) 8x out of 1088x translated as “married” to someone - 1King 7:8 (Solomon); 5x in Ezra and 2x in Neh
 - iii) This begs the question if they were married, “Who married them?” Possibly, unethical priests, - Else, they were shacking up (living together)
 - iv) Context of the passages indicate marriage
- e) Restoration of a marriage is God’s preference
 - i) Priority → Be Reconciled ... **1Cor 7:11; 2Cor 5:18**
 - ii) Where possible, live peaceably w/ all **Ro 12:18**
- 4) **Reconciliation Isn’t Always Quick & Painless**..... **Ch 10**
 - a) Biblical Justifications for Divorce
 - i) Brutality/Safety of the spouse/kids **Mt 18:15-17**
 - ii) Continued Unfaithfulness **Mt 19:3-12**
 - b) It took ~90 days to resolve 110 cases (~1 / day) ..**v16,17**
 - i) Well thought out process to do the right thing the right way at the right time
 - c) Probably, each family was made fully aware of the need for drastic action, and were given several options
 - i) Wives presented with option to convert;
 - ii) Wives & children to be sent back to her father’s household, possibly with financial support;
 - iii) Husbands to depart with family; or, worst case,
 - iv) Family ostracized/excommunicated if they stayed
 - d) **Who was involved:** 16 Priest, 6 other Levites, 1 of the choir, 3 Gatekeepers/Deacons constituted about 25% of the problem, but Levites made up less than 10% of the congregation (as the leaders go, so goes the nation)
 - e) Formal acknowledgement and commitment (oaths) from all cemented the required follow up actions**10:5**
 - Ezra acting alone was not going to effect change
 - He needed God to stir the hearts & to receive agreement from the populace

CONCLUSION

- **Other Lessons from Ezra**
 - ♦ America’s founding fathers made churches and religious leaders exempt from taxation based on **Ezra 7:24**
 - ♦ **Gold nugget:** Shecaniah, son of Jehiel, son of Elam; **10:2,26**
 - Either a son or stepson in a forbidden marriage, & thru good intentions, sought to fix the problem **9:2-4**
 - He loved God’s word more than his own convenience
 - Through this illegitimate son – who, theoretically, should not have been born, a nation was saved from annihilation
 - Whether a child is born in wedlock, out of wedlock, or in a test tube, God determines the soul of that person
- Ezra’s knowledge of God’s word could not alone fix the problem. Ezra, with help from others, and from God “stirring” the hearts, successfully conveyed that knowledge to get buy in