

LESSONS THIS QUARTER

- 1) 07 Dec Esther 1-3 Deliverance is Needed
- 2) 14 Dec Esther 4-10 God Provides Deliverance
- 3) 21 Dec Luke 2 God Provides a Savior
- 4) 28 Dec Ezra 1-6 God Ordains Restoration
- 5) 04 Jan **Ezra 7-10** **God Commands Obedience**
- 6) 11 Jan Nehemiah 1-2 God Inspires the Work
- 7) 18 Jan Sanctity of Life Protect Human Life
- 8) 25 Jan Nehemiah 3-6 Be Faithful in Adversity
- 9) 01 Feb Nehemiah 7 Do Your Appointed Part
- 10) 08 Feb Nehemiah 8 Get an Understanding
- 11) 15 Feb Nehemiah 9 Return to the Restoring God
- 12) 22 Feb Nehemiah 10-13 Commit Your Way to the Lord
- 13) 01 Mar Nahum 1-3 God Is

INTRODUCTION

These chapters touch on a lot of hot issues relevant for us TODAY from same-sex marriages to the “divorce-remarriage” revolution. If Christians do not hold marriage in high honor, how can we expect the rest of the world to do so? Ezra gives us guidance on how to fix broken things in the Church, first.

- **Note #1.** A monogamous, heterosexual marriage of 1 man to 1 woman for life was first defined in the Bible – and it hasn't changed
- **Note #2.** John the Baptist lost his head over this marriage issue when he challenged 2 Gentile non-believers for their unbiblical marriage (Herod & Herodias, Mark 6). God's timeless moral code for marriage was for Jews & non-Jews, believers & non-believers
- **Note #3.** “The divorce revolution has done far more harm to marriage than same-sex marriage will ever do” – Albert Mohler
- Therefore, what can and should we do to turn things around – To save marriages and avert adultery and other forms of immorality?
 - ♦ **Challenge #1.** A same-sex couple has biological, surrogate, and/or adopted kids. One adult comes to Christ and wants to live right. What counsel do we give?
 - ♦ **Challenge #2.** The remarriage of a divorcee while previous spouse is still living is adulterous according to Scripture (Mat 5:32). There are no exceptions. The Church, by remarrying divorcees, in essence, condones adultery and loses its credibility before its youth and the world. How do we fix this?
 - ♦ **Challenge #3.** Statistics show that Christians have the same or higher divorce rate than the world. How can we fix this and reduce the number of adulterated remarriages?
- **Ezra's Solution to Resolve Wrongful Marriages.** We will see that it took the whole community of believers, including the parties in the wrong, to right the wrongs. Over 100 cases were treated on an individual basis and in a compassionate manner.

Passage	Comments
Ezra 7	<p>Ezra Comes To Town</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vv2,6,10. Ezra – a skilled scribe from the line of Zadok <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Zadok priests were the only Levites who remained faithful during Israel's worst apostate times Ez 44:15 ♦ Head knowledge of God's word is not enough. We must be Doers and not Hearers only. We must live it & share it. • Ezra's Leadership Qualities: He was knowledgeable and seasoned in God's word; He could be stern, severe, compassionate, encouraging; He identified w/ the people (“this is our problem”); He listened to sound advice from others, & he acted courageously
Ezra 8	<p>Ezra's Entourage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ezra arrived 58 years after the temple was completed • Ezra's journey of 800 miles took 4 months (~10mi/day) • God's providential care of Ezra's entourage was not automatic, but was directly related to Ezra's decisions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ God could've protected Ezra w/out prayer, but He delights answering even the obvious Zech 10:1 ♦ vv24-34. Leadership accountability is a must

Passage	Comments
Ezra 9	<p>National Crisis for Israel – Unequally-yoked Marriages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rededication of the temple and restoration of traditions was not enough to enable the people to automatically stay close to God <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Something else was needed – BUT WHAT? ♦ Personal commitment? Desire to live righteously? • History was about to repeat itself, so drastic action was needed to avoid another national dispersion and annihilation due to run-away idolatry and immorality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ 110 cases out of 50,000 is a mere 0.2% (equivalent to one person out of 500) – So why the uproar? ♦ TODAY, more than 25% of Christian marriages have ended in divorce; 29% for Baptist denominations. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This causes a loss of testimony, to the extent new start up churches often avoid putting “Baptist” in their name because of negative connotations 2. Future generations learn that divorce and remarriage is the path of least resistance 3. We need to own up to this problem and work it • The severity of Israel's sin necessitated everyone needing to confess, repent, investigate, and act courageously and decisively 10:6-8 • Israel was under a land covenant w/ God, therefore, marriages to idolatrous/unbelieving spouses violated this covenant because it polluted the land and the holiness of God's people Ezek 36:18 • If no repentance, national annihilation was the only fix for run-away idolatry and immorality Ezek 23:46-49 (e.g., Noah's world, Sodom/Gomorrah, tribe of Benjamin) • Also, national sin cuts off gladness & joy from God's house. Why go to church if it's not enjoyable? Joel 1 • Consider this. Marriage of an Israelite to a believing non-Israelite spouse was acceptable by God: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Joseph married an Egyptian Gen 41:45 2. Boaz married Ruth (a Moabite) Ruth 1:4; Mt 1:5 3. Moses wed a Midianite & an Ethiopian/Cushite ... Num 12:1 4. Salmon married Rahab (a Canaanite) ... Josh 6:25; Mt 1:4,5
NT vs OT Considerations on What Constitutes a Biblical Marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NOTE. Separating from an unbelieving spouse is not applicable to us NT believers 1Cor 7:10-15; 39-40 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Marriage to an unbelieving spouse, though, detrimental in some regards, is not a national crisis for NT believers as it was for OT Israel since they were under a land covenant with God – We are not • Why are monogamous heterosexual marriages important? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. First & foremost – God's word defines it that way 2. Promotes God's natural order of procreation 3. Promotes a healthy family unit to develop well-adjusted “normal” children 4. Promotes a healthier society over “anything goes” • Recall the Woman at the Well – Jesus acknowledged all 5 of her previous marriages as valid, but not her most recent relationship with a live-in boyfriend John 4 • Restoration of a marriage is God's preference, assuming the marriage was valid to begin with (except Herod & Herodias) • Priority is to reconcile, not divorce 1Cor 7:11; 2Cor 5:18 • Another priority is our call to peace Ro 12:18; 1Cor 7:15



Passage	Comments
Ezra 10	<p>Reconciliation Isn't Always Quick & Painless</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are Biblical Reasons for Divorce <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brutality & safety of the spouse & kids Mt 18:15-17 Continued unfaithfulness of a spouse Mt 19:3-12 For Jews ONLY - Unequally yoked to idolaters..... Deut 7:3 Note 1. There is no biblical justification for remarriage. A divorced person is to reconcile or remain single ..1Cor 7:11 Note 2. In the OT, God allowed divorce to bring mercy into a wife's bad situation where the husband accused her of adultery or uncleanness but had no proof. Recall that if there was proof of infidelity, the punishment was stoning. Note 3. Jesus stated that men caused their wives to commit adultery when they divorced them (Mat 5:32). HOW? Because they had to get remarried just to survive Note 4. There is no biblical rationale to make a remarriage of a divorcee non-adulterous while a former spouse lives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catholics try to circumvent this problem by pronouncing the annulment of a marriage – but that is a mockery of God's word (i.e., "Whatever you loose on earth is loosed in heaven" – Mat 16:19; 18:18) It took ~90 days to resolve 110 cases (~1/day) vv16, 17 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ezra followed a well thought out process to do the right thing in a compassionate way Probably, each family was made fully aware of the need for drastic and immediate action, and were given several options: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Wives were possibly presented w/ option to convert Wives & children were to be sent back to her father's household, possibly with financial support Husbands might depart with wife & kids; or... ...the family was ostracized/excommunicated if they stayed in Israel The Leaders were also Guilty: 16 Priests, 6 other Levites, 1 choir member, and 3 Gatekeepers constituted about 25% of the problem, but Levites made up about 10% of the populace <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As the leaders go, so goes the nation / congregation vv3-5. Formal acknowledgement and commitment from everyone (via oaths) cemented the required actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If Ezra acted alone he was not going to effect change The people also had to properly TREMBLE at God's word to effect true change (9:4; 10:3). Do we tremble at God's word today, or do we play with it and take it whimsically? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Isaiah 66:2 God looks favorably on those who humble themselves and TREMBLE at His word (that is, they take His word seriously, not half-heartedly)
Gold Nugget Passage 10:2-4,26	<p>Shecaniah, son of Jehiel, son of Elam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> He was a son in a forbidden marriage, BUT he saw Ezra as the right man who could take charge and help fix the problem "according to the law" So he told Ezra "this is your job" AND "we will be with you" He loved God's word more than his own reputation Through this illegitimate son – who, theoretically, should not have been born (like Solomon and Jephthah), a nation was saved from another dispersion and possible annihilation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whether a child is born in wedlock, out of wedlock, or in a test tube, God determines the soul of that person
What Can We Do TODAY?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The Church needs to change its cavalier position on divorce & remarriage (Adultery is our Jezebel)..... Rev 2:18-29 Seek marriage reconciliation, not divorce1Cor 7:11 Do we say NO to the church remarrying divorcees... 1Cor 7:11 Do we say NO to pastors, elders, deacons who are divorced or who married a divorcee (standards for leaders & spouses require them to be "above reproach")Mat 5:32; 1Tim 3:2, 10 Consider adopting a resolution similar to what SBC crafted in Orlando, FL, 2010: http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/1205 Other ideas: _____

CONCLUSION/APPLICATIONS

- Fortunately, God does not want to throw anyone away, including the woman at the well who had 5 husbands and a live-in boyfriend, BUT there will always be inherent problems with divorces & remarriages.
- Ezra's extensive knowledge of God's word could not by itself fix the problem. Ezra, with help from others, and from God "stirring" the hearts, needed buy-in. We, too, must seek buy-in from our church populace to implement any lasting change.

NEXT WEEK: Nehemiah 1-2. Godly people in ungodly situations doing their godly mission

