

Dear Heavenly Father,

### *Praise*

I see your mercy and grace behind Ezra's return. He had no idea that the remnant had violated your covenant by marrying idolatrous wives, but you did. You sent Ezra back at that specific time in order to call your people to repentance and renewed loyalty to you. You could have destroyed them for their sin, but instead you reached out with discipline and love. How great is your faithfulness! Hallelujah!

### *Today in Your Word*

Four months after Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem, the princes reported to him that the returnees had intermarried with the "people of the lands." These people practiced the same abominations that the Hittites, Canaanites, and Jebusites had practiced, and thus the marriages were a clear violation of the Law (Deut 7:1–6). Ezra was horrified. He tore his clothing and hair and sat in stunned silence. At the time of the evening sacrifice, he rose and offered a prayer of confession. Shecaniah suggested that they make a covenant with you and send the foreign women away. Ezra made the elders of Israel swear to do as they had said, and he sent messengers to inform the remnant that they must appear in Jerusalem within three days or face confiscation of all property and excommunication from the congregation. Three days later the whole congregation arrived and sat trembling in the rain, waiting for Ezra to address them. Rebuking them for their unfaithfulness, he commanded them to separate from "the peoples of the land and from the foreign women." When the meeting concluded, a commission was established, and three months later, 113 men sent away their wives and children. This story teaches me several lessons. First, it shows me that any relationship that endangers or compromises wholehearted devotion to you is forbidden. This applies not only to marriage, but also to friendships, business partnerships, and military alliances. Second, it teaches me that my relationship with you is more important than any other relationship. This is clearly seen in the Law where you commanded that if a man's wife enticed him to idolatry, he was not to spare her or have pity on her, but was to bring her before the people and stone her (Deut 13:6–11). Since the Jewish men had voluntarily married these foreign women, knowing that they worshipped other gods, and since the women were unwilling to give up their idolatry (cf. Ezra 6:21), separation was a merciful solution to the problem. It spared the women, *and* it removed the spiritual danger they posed to their husbands and the entire community. Third, it teaches me that my actions affect the community in which I live. What 113 men had done brought the entire remnant under your wrath (Ezra 10:14). Corporate holiness is therefore an individual responsibility. My community will be holy only as I and the other members separate ourselves from sin and set our hearts to seek you.

### *Reflection*

Are there any relationships that I've allowed in my life that are a threat to my relationship with you? Do I need to end a partnership or business venture that I've made with an unbeliever?

### *Request*

Father, your laws concerning relationships with the wicked are there for my protection (2 Cor 6:14–18). Help me resist the temptation to pursue ungodly friendships. May I remain loyal to you alone!

### *Thanksgiving*

Thank you for sending people like Ezra into my life to challenge me to remain faithful to you!

In Jesus' name, Amen.

*Suggested Hymn: "[Before Thee, God Who Knowest All](#)" – M. B. Landstad.*

*Meditation Verse: Ezra 9:4.*