

# The Return of the Exiles



Class 3: Second Return under Ezra

# The Long Route Home

The return of the exiles to Judah, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, was accomplished in three main stages.

**The first** and main party returns with Zerubbabel 538 BC. His focus is on rebuilding the temple.

**A second** party returns with Ezra about 60 years after the temple is rebuilt. Ezra makes spiritual and religious restoration and reform.

**A third** wave returns with Nehemiah 13 years after Ezra. Nehemiah works to rebuild the city walls and gates.

## The Second Return

1. King Artaxerxes allows more exiles to leave Babylon.
2. Ezra, a priest and Torah scholar, focuses on strengthening the community and teaching the Law.
3. Ezra leads a small group of about 1500 men (plus families) back to Jerusalem.
4. The people stumble and sin by intermingling with the nations.
5. Ezra prays for the community and the people come up with a plan to avoid further punishment by God.

# Return under Ezra

## Ezra

Ezra 7-10

Returns 58 years after the temple was rebuilt **to teach and rebuild the *spiritual temple***

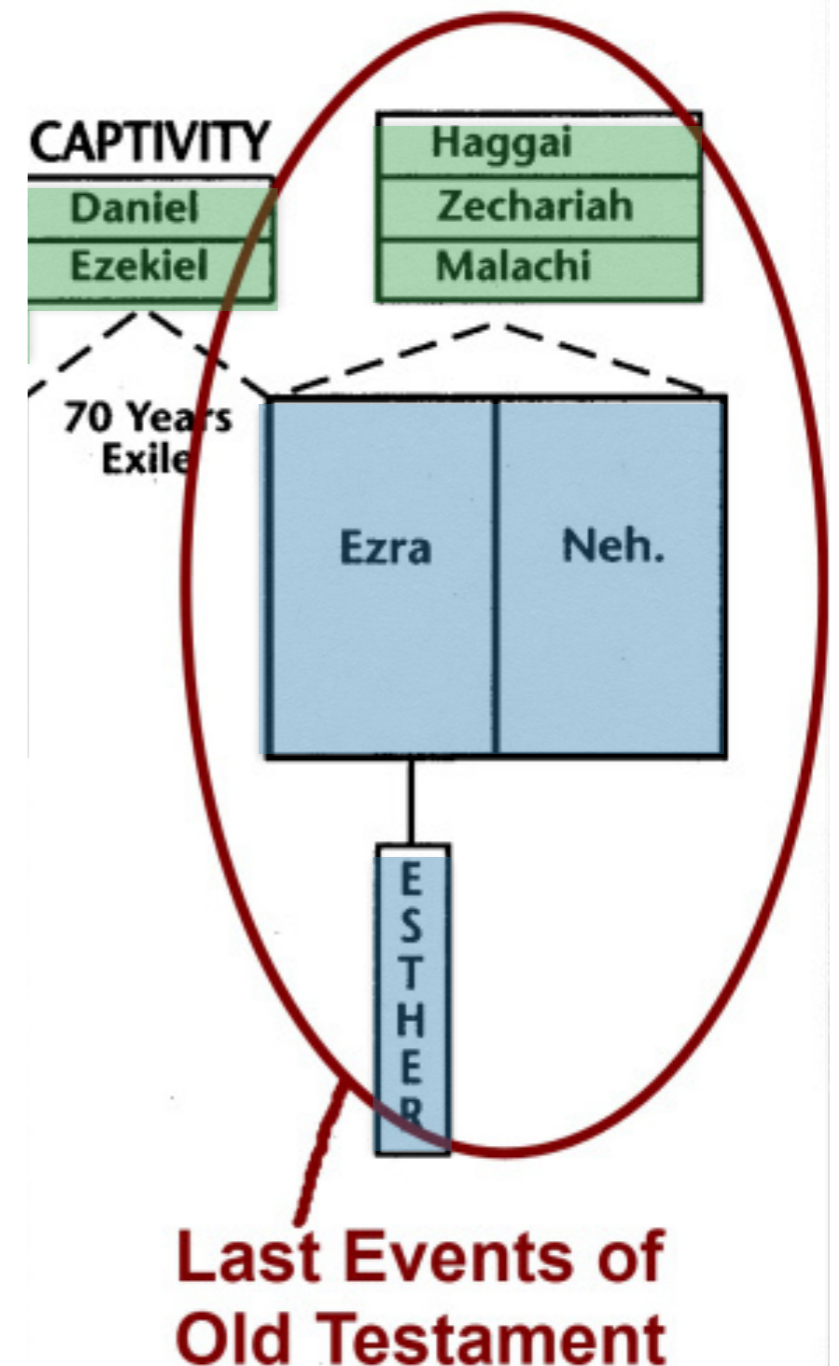
## Ezra 7:6-10

Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him. Some of the Israelites, including priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers and temple servants, also came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.

8Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the gracious hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

# Old Testament Chronology

The book of Esther likely takes place after the return of Zerubbabel, but before Ezra's return.



# The Book of Esther

- Haman's persecution and accusations against the exiled Jews (cp. Esther 3:5, 13; Ezra 4:6) likely motivated some of the persecuted Jews to flee to safety in Jerusalem.
- Mordecai's position allowed him to intervene for his people and paved the way for Ezra's favorable treatment by successor kings.

## **Esther 3:13**

Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and children—on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.

## **Ezra 4:6**

At the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, they lodged an accusation against the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

# The Book of Esther

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## **Esther 10:3**

Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Xerxes, preeminent among the Jews, and held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews, because **he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews.**

# Introducing Ezra

- Just as Zerubbabel was from the Royal Line of King David, **Ezra was from the Priestly Line of Aaron, the first High Priest.**
- Ezra devoted himself to studying and teaching the Law of Moses.

## **Ezra 7:6-10**

6 Ezra ... the son of Aaron the chief priest— this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given.

10 For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

# The Hand of the LORD his God was upon Him

- Ezra 7:6 -- The king granted Ezra all that he asked for...
- Ezra 7:9 -- Ezra began to go up from Babylon and came to Jerusalem for...
- Ezra 7:28 -- Ezra took courage before the king and his men, and gathered leading men to go with him for...
- Ezra 8:18 -- Ezra is sent ministers for the house of God for...
- Ezra 8:22 -- on all who seek God for...
- Ezra 8:31 -- God delivered them from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way for ...



# Artaxerxes Letter

- Authorized Ezra to return with a copy of the Torah (7:14).

## **Ezra 7:12-14**

Artaxerxes, king of kings,

To Ezra the priest, teacher of the Law of the God of heaven: Greetings.

**Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom, including priests and Levites, who volunteer to go to Jerusalem with you, may go.** You are sent by the king and his seven advisers to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to **the Law of your God, which is in your hand.**

# Artaxerxes Letter

- Authorized Ezra to return with a copy of the Torah (7:14).

- Provided money from King, free will offerings from Babylonian Jews, and tax revenue from neighboring enemy provinces (7:15-24).

## Ezra 7:15-24

15Moreover, you are to take with you the **silver and gold that the king and his advisers have freely given** to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, **together with all the silver and gold you may obtain from the province of Babylon, as well as the freewill offerings of the people and priests for the temple of their God in Jerusalem.**

21Now I, King Artaxerxes, decree that all **the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates are to provide with diligence whatever Ezra the priest, the teacher of the Law of the God of heaven, may ask of you**

# Artaxerxes Letter

- Authorized Ezra to return with a copy of the Torah (7:14).
- Provided money from King, free will offerings from Babylonian Jews, and tax revenue from neighboring enemy provinces (7:15-24).

- Commanded to appoint judges to teach and administer the Laws of Yahweh (7:25-26).

## **Ezra 7:25-26**

And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates—all who know the laws of your God.

**And you are to teach any who do not know them** (the Laws of Yahweh).

# Where are the Levites?



When Ezra stages the exiles by the Ahava Canal, he discovers **there are no Levites among the 1496 returnees** (8:15-20).

## What do we know about the Levites?

Did not receive any land as an inheritance upon entering the promised land, but **depended on receiving tithes from the people** instead.

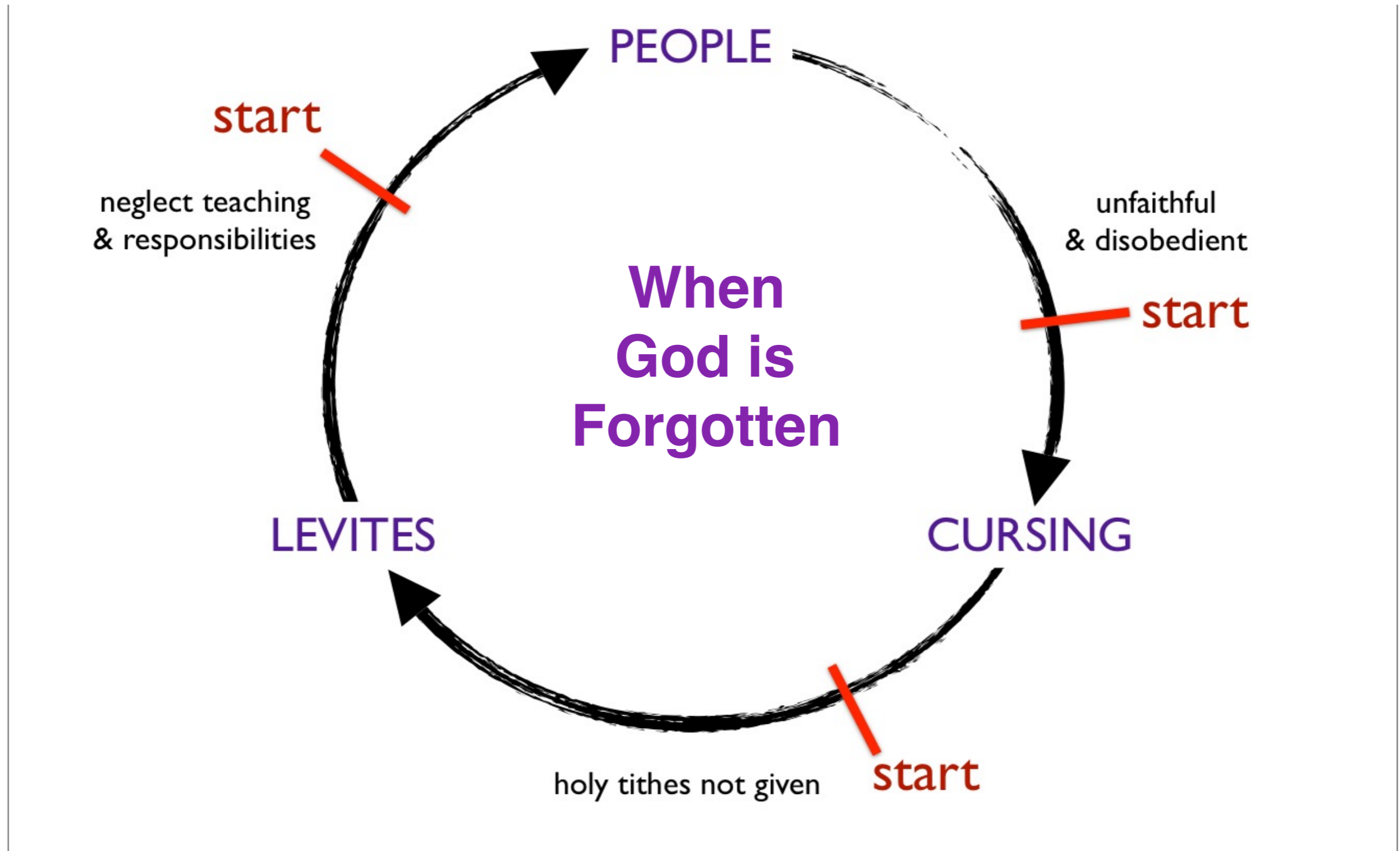
1. Unlike the priests, Levites were not descendants of Aaron so they served as aides to the priests.
2. Their responsibilities were to help prepare the sacrifices, and take care of the temple by making repairs when needed.
3. They also served as musicians, singers, and gatekeepers, and were also to be the nation's teachers, scribes, and judges.

# The Need for Mutual Reliance



From: Bro. Tim Badger

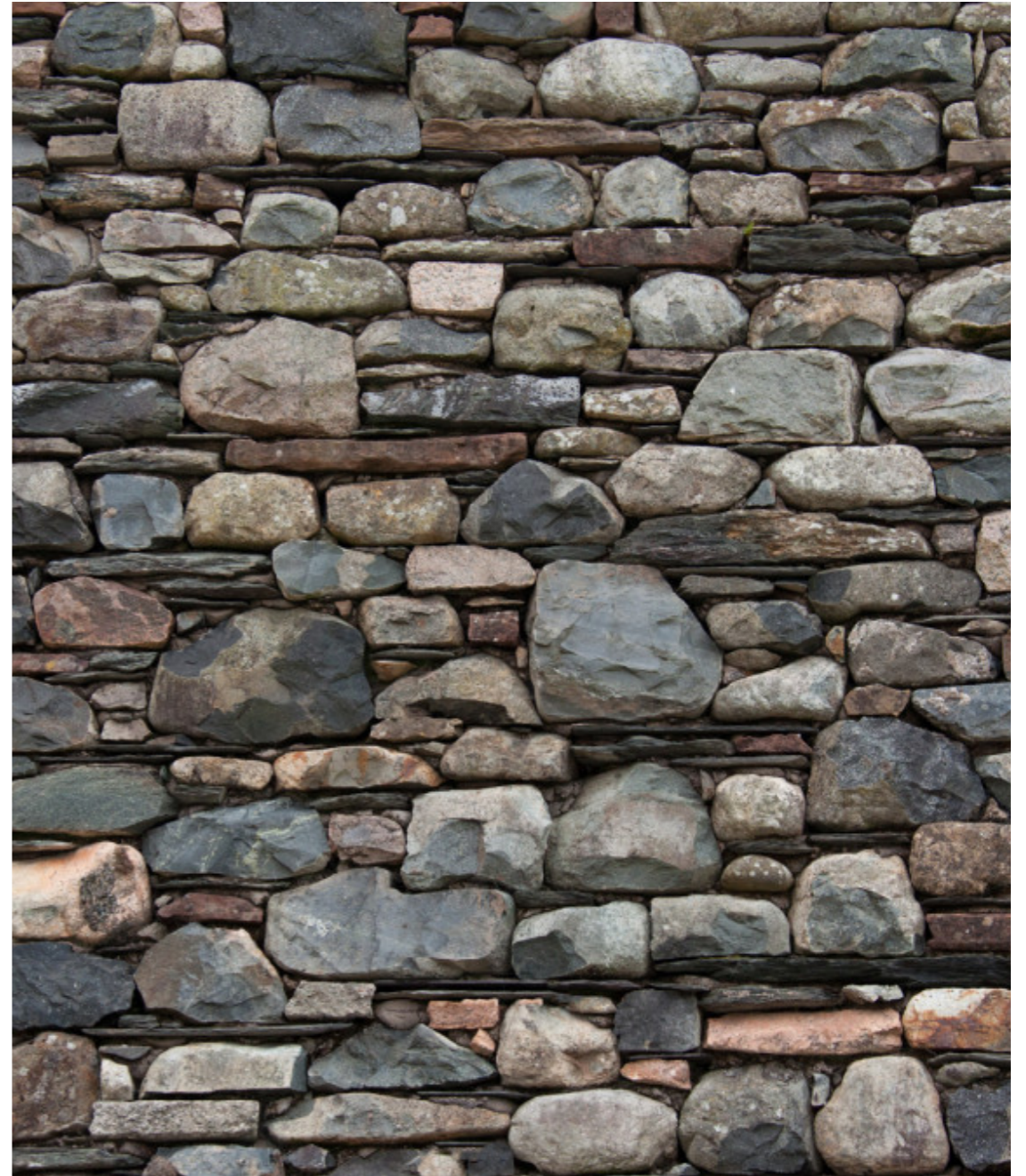
# The Need for Mutual Reliance



# Rebuilding the Spiritual Temple

And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God.

1 Peter 2:5



# Eventually 38 Levites Return

## **Ezra 8:18-20**

Because the gracious hand of our God was with us, they brought us Sherebiah, a capable man, from the descendants of Mahli son of Levi, the son of Israel, and Sherebiah's sons and brothers, 18 in all; and Hashabiah, together with Jeshaiiah from the descendants of Merari, and his brothers and nephews, 20 in all.

They also brought 220 of the temple servants—a body that David and the officials had established to assist the Levites. All were registered by name.

**Do we sometimes make the same mistake as the Levites and get our priorities wrong?**

**Beware** of career and lifestyle choices that might draw us away from serving God and our ecclesial family.

**Remember** the lesson from Ruth. Elimilech planned only to "sojourn" for a while in Moab, but ended up dying after staying there 10 years!



# Ezra's Leadership

- **Ezra 8:21-23** Ezra instructs the people to fast and pray for a safe journey.
- **Ezra 8:35** Ezra leads the people in worship as a first priority upon entering the land.

## **Ezra 8:21-23**

There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him." So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.

# Ezra's Leadership

- **Ezra 8:21-23** Ezra instructs the people to fast and pray for a safe journey.

- **Ezra 8:35** Ezra leads the people in worship as a first priority upon entering the land.

## **Ezra 8:35**

Then the exiles who had returned from captivity sacrificed burnt offerings to the God of Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven male lambs and, as a sin offering, twelve male goats. All this was a burnt offering to the Lord

# Crisis in the Community!

## Ezra 9:1-2

The leaders came to me and said, **“The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices**, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And **the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness.**”



# Rebuilding the Spiritual Temple

The people of Israel **and the priests and the Levites** have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations...

Ezra 9:2

## **2 Corinthians 6:14**

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

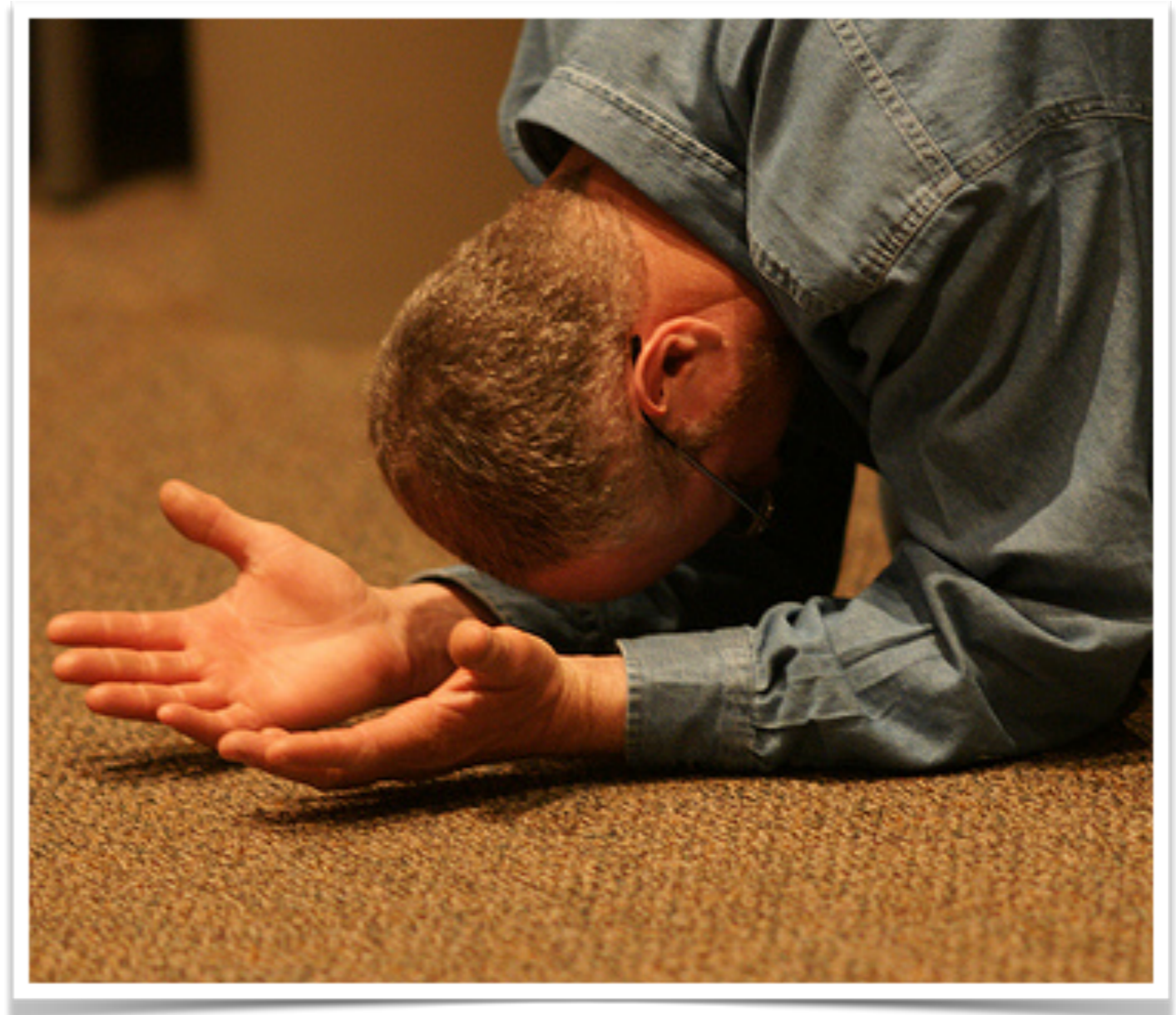
# Ezra's Intercessory Prayer



# Ezra's Intercessory Prayer

## Ezra 9:5-15

- Humility (v6)
- Confession of "our" sins (v7)
- Acknowledgement of God's mercy (v8-9) in spite of:
  - Prior warning (v11)
  - Command to be separate (v12)
  - The fact that they deserved to be punished (v13-15)



# Ezra's Intercessory Prayer

## Ezra 9:5-14

5Then, at the evening sacrifice, I ... fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the Lord my God and prayed: "I am too ashamed and disgraced, my God, to lift up my face to you, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens.

10For we have forsaken the commands you gave through your servants the prophets when you said: 'The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruption of its peoples. By their detestable practices they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other. Therefore, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them at any time, that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it to your children as an everlasting inheritance.'

14Shall we then break your commands again and intermarry with the peoples who commit such detestable practices? **Would you not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivor?**

# Rebuilding the Spiritual Temple

## Dt 13:12-16

If you hear it said about one of the towns the Lord your God is giving you to live in that troublemakers have arisen among you and have led the people of their town astray, saying, "Let us go and worship other gods" (gods you have not known), then you must inquire, probe and investigate it thoroughly. And **if it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done among you, you must certainly put to the sword all who live in that town. You must destroy it completely, both its people and its livestock.**

The elders and people were sinning by living with foreign women who might easily pull the Jews back into idolatry. **The punishment for worshipping other gods was utter destruction** for all.



# A Plan of Action

## **Ezra 10:1-5**

- Suggestion by Shekariah
- Let us send away the foreign women and children
- All must appear within 3 days (v8)

## **Ezra 10:1-8**

1While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites gathered around him. They too wept bitterly. 2Then Shekariah ... said to Ezra, "We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel. 3Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and of those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law.

8Anyone who failed to appear within three days would forfeit all his property, in accordance with the decision of the officials and elders, and would himself be expelled from the assembly of the exiles.

# Opposition!



## **Ezra 10:14-15**

Some were opposed but we don't know why.

- Was plan too lenient?
- Was plan too harsh?

# The People's Confession

## Ezra's Rebuke

- Rebuke -- "You" have been unfaithful (v10)
- Command to Repent (v11)

## The People's Confession

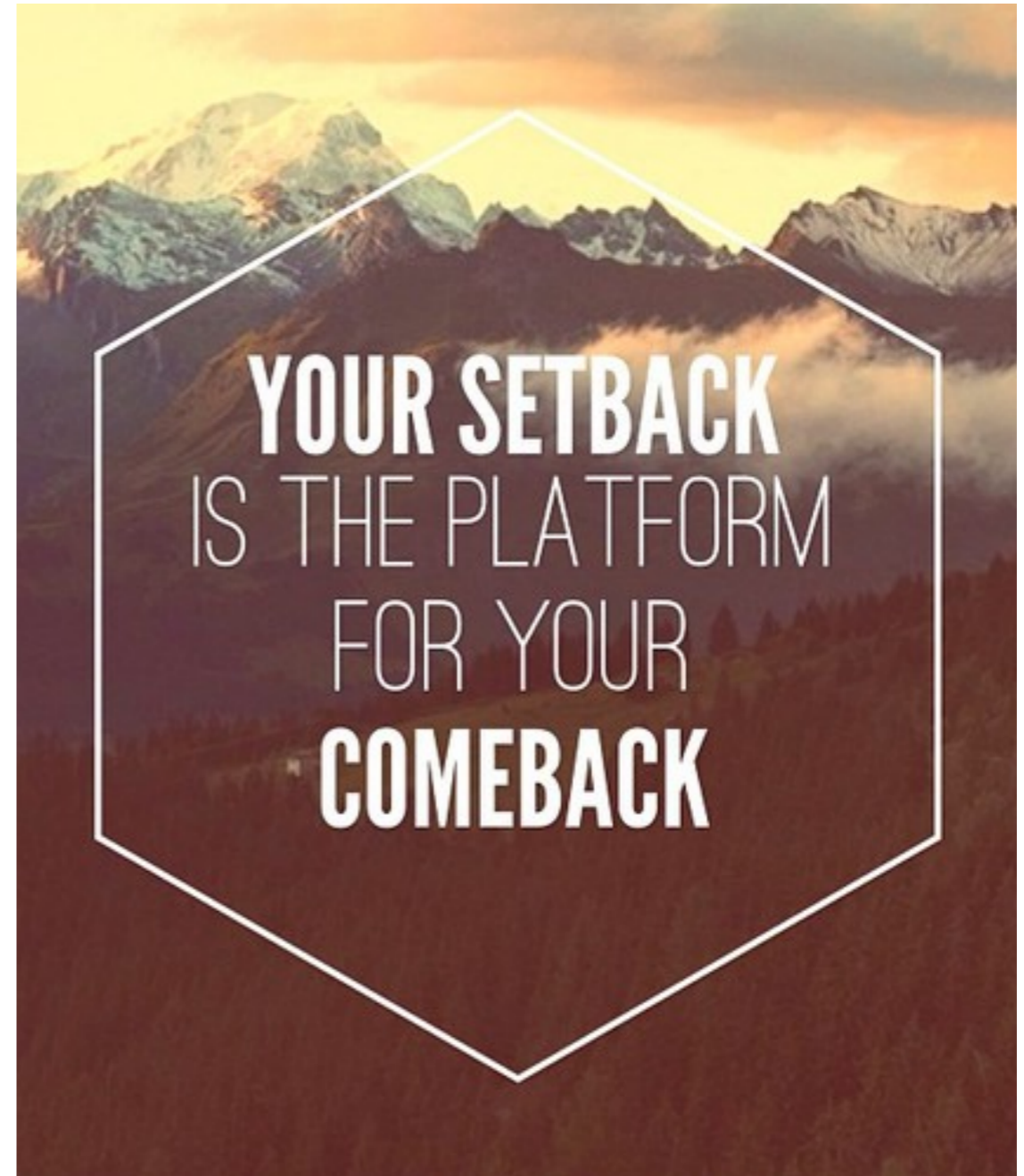
- Admission of sin and agreement to put away the foreign women. (v12-16)

### **Ezra 10:9-12**

Within the three days, all the men of Judah and Benjamin had gathered in Jerusalem. And on the twentieth day of the ninth month, all the people were sitting in the square before the house of God, greatly distressed by the occasion and because of the rain. Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have been unfaithful; you have married foreign women, adding to Israel's guilt. Now honor the Lord, the God of your ancestors, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives." The whole assembly responded with a loud voice: "You are right! We must do as you say."

# Rebuilding Efforts Often Have Mixed Results

- Zerubbabel's efforts to rebuild the temple faced opposition and took much longer than expected -- 21 years!
- Ezra's efforts to teach the people and strengthen the community was met with setback and sin.



Are you troubled by this plan?

# Understanding God's Will

**Is it possible that those who were opposed to the plan were correct?**

Nowhere does the record say that Shekeniah's suggestion to send the women and children away had God's approval.



# God Hates Divorce



Malachi was a contemporary prophet who rebuked the nation for putting away their wives.

- Malachi 2:14-16

It would seem inconsistent for God to approve of divorce in Ezra while simultaneously disapproving it in Malachi, **unless the foreign women were not actually wives.**

# Marriage or Living Together?

**Ezra 9:3** "For they have taken some of their daughters [to be wives] for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands."

**Ezra 10:2** "We have broken faith with our God and [have married] foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this."

**The description of "wives" and "marriages" is an interpretation of the translators.**

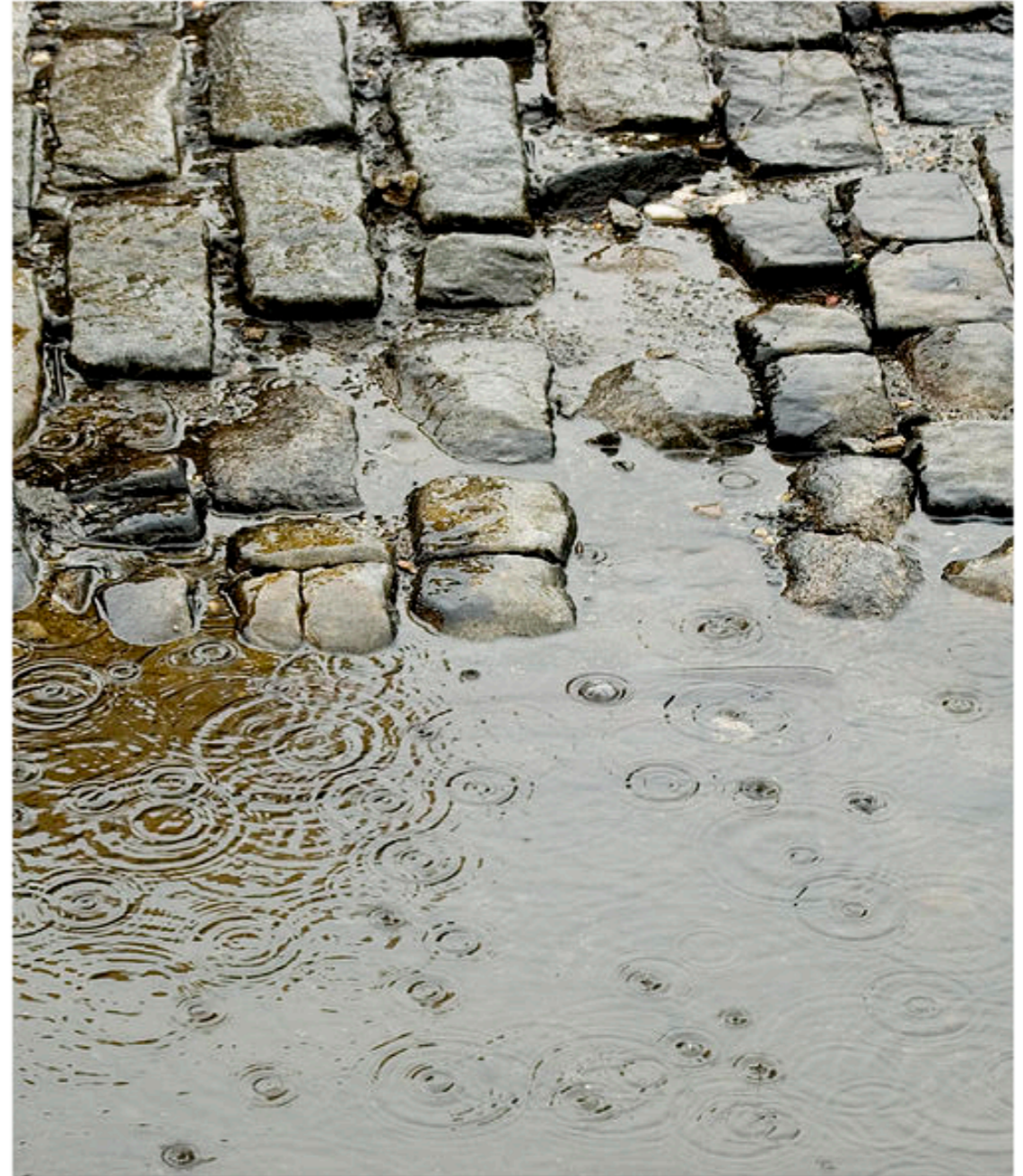
- The word for wives is not in the original text. (9:2,12)
- According to the NET Bible Translation Notes, the word "married" literally says, "they gave dwelling to" (10:2,14,17,18).



# Why the Delay?

**Ezra 10:13** But there are many people here and it is the rainy season; so we cannot stand outside. Besides, this matter cannot be taken care of in a day or two.

**Ezra 10:16-17** On the first day of the tenth month they sat down to investigate the cases, and by the first day of the first month they finished dealing with all the men who had [taken] foreign women.



# Why the Delay?

1. Is it possible the delay was designed to give the foreign women the opportunity to convert to Judaism?
2. Does it surprise you that this national crisis resulted in only 110 men needing to send away foreign women?
3. Were there many more women who committed to worshiping the One True God and were permitted to remain?



# Rebuilding the Spiritual Temple

The Law of Moses permitted the marriage of Jews with foreign women if, and only if, they abandoned polytheism and adopted the worship of the One God (Dt. 21:10-14).

It appears this conversion initially took place under the return of Zerubbabel.

## **Ezra 6:21**

So the Israelites who had returned from the exile ate it, **together with all who had separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors in order to seek the Lord, the God of Israel.**

# Let Your God be my God

