

Ezra 10:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.

Analysis

Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Shecaniah proposes a radical covenant (berit) to resolve the crisis. The phrase "**put away**" (hotzi, from yatsa, "to go out/send away") refers to formal divorce proceedings, not casual abandonment. This required legal process with certificates (Deuteronomy 24:1) and likely provisions for the women and children, though Scripture doesn't detail those arrangements.

Shecaniah's reference to "**those that tremble**" (hacharedim) at God's commandment echoes Isaiah 66:2,5—the remnant who revere God's Word above social pressure. The insistence "**let it be done according to the law**" (kattorah) grounds this painful action in divine command, not human preference. The Torah explicitly forbade marriage to Canaanite peoples (Deuteronomy 7:3-4) because such unions inevitably led to idolatry.

This covenant represents corporate commitment to drastic obedience. The phrase "**and such as are born of them**" reveals the tragedy—families must be separated to preserve covenant integrity. While deeply troubling to modern sensibilities, the

text prioritizes theological fidelity over emotional comfort, viewing covenant unfaithfulness as existential threat to the community's relationship with God.

Historical Context

Shecaniah ben Jehiel speaks despite his own father being among the offenders (Ezra 10:26). His proposal came approximately 458 BC during Ezra's governorship in post-exilic Jerusalem. The community faced existential crisis: violating the very commands whose transgression had caused the Babylonian exile. The previous generation had lost everything—temple, city, land—because of covenant unfaithfulness. Now the restoration community risked repeating those sins.

Ancient Near Eastern marriage practices made intermarriage politically expedient for establishing alliances and social stability. The returned exiles numbered perhaps 50,000 in a region populated by much larger groups. Marrying into local populations seemed pragmatic for survival. However, Torah explicitly forbade such marriages because pagan spouses consistently drew Israelites into idolatry (1 Kings 11:1-8, Nehemiah 13:26).

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does Shecaniah's proposal demonstrate that true covenant loyalty sometimes requires painful obedience that contradicts human wisdom?
2. What does the phrase "those that tremble at the commandment" teach about the remnant's distinguishing characteristic?

3. How should Christians balance compassion for human relationships with uncompromising obedience to God's revealed will?

Interlinear Text

כָּל	לְהוֹצֵא	יא	אֱלֹהִים	יְנוּ	בְּרִית	יְתִהְעַרְתָּ	נְכָרְתָּ	וְעַתָּה	הִ
H3605									
	to put away		of our God		is		is cut off		now
	H3318		H430		H1285		H1992		H6258
בְּעֵץ	תְּ		מִתְּמֻמָּה		וּבְפִטְולֵל	דְּ	וְעַלְמָנִים	נְשָׁוֹם	וְעַתָּה
H6098			H1992		H3205		H802		H3772
אֱלֹהִים	יְנוּ		בְּמִצְרָיִם		וּבְתִּירָנִים	וְעַלְמָנִים	וְעַלְמָנִים	אֱלֹהִים	אֱלֹהִים
H430			H4687		H2730		H113		H113
וְעַשֵּׂה:			וְעַשֵּׂה:		וְעַשֵּׂה:		וְעַשֵּׂה:		וְעַשֵּׂה:
H6213			H6213		H8451		according to the law	and let it be done	

Additional Cross-References

Ezra 9:4 (Word): Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

Psalms 119:120 (Parallel theme): My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.

Psalms 119:59 (Parallel theme): I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.

Nehemiah 9:38 (Covenant): And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it.

Deuteronomy 29:12 (Covenant): That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day:

2 Chronicles 34:21 (Word): Go, enquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book.

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