

Ezra 10:32

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah.

Analysis

Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah.

This brief genealogical entry appears in Ezra's list of Israelites who married foreign women during the post-exilic period and subsequently divorced them to maintain covenant faithfulness. The Hebrew names carry theological significance: Binyamin ("son of the right hand," indicating favor), Mallukh ("counselor" or "king," from root *malak*), and Shemaryah ("Yahweh has kept/guarded," from *shamar* - to keep, guard, observe).

These three men descended from Hashum's family (v. 33), part of the priestly line responsible for maintaining covenant purity. Their inclusion in this list represents personal spiritual failure but also repentant obedience. The foreign marriage prohibition (Deuteronomy 7:3-4) aimed to prevent idolatry, not ethnic prejudice - these marriages threatened Israel's spiritual identity and worship of Yahweh.

While seemingly minor, these names represent the painful post-exilic community struggle to maintain covenant distinctiveness after Babylonian exile. Each name in Ezra 10 represents a family crisis, difficult decisions, and renewed commitment to Torah obedience. The list demonstrates that spiritual restoration sometimes requires costly personal sacrifice, and that corporate covenant faithfulness depends on individual obedience.

Historical Context

This verse occurs during Ezra's reforms (circa 458 BCE), approximately 80 years after the first exiles returned under Zerubbabel (538 BCE). The Jewish community in Jerusalem struggled with identity, assimilation pressures, and maintaining covenant distinctiveness while surrounded by neighboring peoples.

Foreign marriages became widespread among returned exiles, including priests and Levites (Ezra 9:1-2), threatening the community's spiritual integrity. The concern wasn't racial but religious - foreign wives brought pagan worship practices (1 Kings 11:1-8 shows Solomon's foreign wives leading him to idolatry). Ezra's reaction (tearing his garment, pulling his hair, Ezra 9:3) reflects ancient Near Eastern mourning customs expressing profound grief over covenant violation.

The communal assembly (Ezra 10:9) gathered in winter rain, demonstrating serious commitment to address this crisis. The genealogical lists (Ezra 10:18-44) served legal, historical, and theological functions - documenting who divorced foreign wives, maintaining tribal records, and demonstrating corporate repentance. Archaeological evidence from Elephantine (Jewish military colony in Egypt, 5th century BCE) shows intermarriage was common among diaspora Jews, making Ezra's reforms counter-cultural and controversial but necessary for preserving Jewish identity and monotheistic worship.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How do we reconcile Ezra's strict prohibition of intermarriage with New Testament teachings on marriage to unbelievers (1 Corinthians 7:12-14)?
2. What principles can we derive from Ezra 10 about maintaining spiritual distinctiveness without falling into ethnic or cultural superiority?
3. In what ways does this passage challenge modern Christians to examine compromises that threaten spiritual integrity?
4. How should we understand the harsh measure of divorcing foreign wives in light of God's hatred of divorce (Malachi 2:16)?
5. What does the detailed genealogical record teach us about individual accountability within corporate covenant community?

Interlinear Text

שְׁמַרְיָה: מֶלֶךְ וְבָתִים |
Benjamin **Malluch** **and Shemariah**
H1144 H4409 H8114

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