

Ezra 10:40

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai,

Analysis

Names in the Registry of Repentance

This verse appears in the midst of a solemn registry cataloging men who had married foreign wives contrary to God's covenant commands. The three names listed—Machnadebai, Shashai, and Sharai—represent real individuals who faced the painful choice between their unlawful marriages and covenant faithfulness. The Hebrew text preserves these names without elaboration, giving them a stark, documentary quality that underscores the gravity of the situation.

Each name represents a family torn apart by the demands of holiness. Machnadebai may derive from roots meaning "gift of the noble one," Shashai possibly meaning "noble" or "whitish," and Sharai meaning "Jehovah is deliverer." Ironically, these men whose very names spoke of nobility and divine deliverance had compromised their covenant identity through forbidden marriages.

The listing of individual names rather than collective statistics emphasizes personal accountability before God. Each person must answer for their own choices, and corporate repentance requires individual confession. These names, preserved in Scripture for millennia, stand as witnesses to both Israel's failure and their willingness to make painful corrections when confronted with God's law.

Historical Context

The Crisis of Intermarriage in Post-Exilic Israel

Following the Babylonian exile (586-538 BC), Jewish returnees faced the challenge of rebuilding both their physical city and their spiritual identity. Under Ezra's leadership around 458 BC, the community discovered widespread violation of Deuteronomy 7:3's prohibition against intermarriage with surrounding peoples. This wasn't mere ethnic prejudice but a safeguard against idolatry—foreign wives often brought their gods with them, as Solomon's experience demonstrated (1 Kings 11:1-8).

The crisis threatened the very survival of Israel as God's covenant people. Having just returned from exile caused partially by religious syncretism, the community recognized they were repeating the sins that had brought judgment. Ezra led a public confession and reformation requiring the dissolution of these marriages—a heart-wrenching decision affecting entire families. The detailed lists in Ezra 10, including verse 40, served as public records of those who complied, demonstrating transparency and accountability in the repentance process.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. Why does Scripture preserve the individual names of those who sinned rather than simply recording statistics?
2. What does this passage teach about the relationship between personal holiness and community covenant faithfulness?
3. How should we balance compassion for human relationships with obedience to God's clear commands?

4. In what ways might modern believers compromise their spiritual identity through 'unequal yokes' (2 Corinthians 6:14)?
5. What can we learn from Ezra's approach to corporate sin that applies to church discipline today?

Interlinear Text

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| מַכְנַדֵּב י | שָׁשׁ י | שָׂרַי: |
| Machnadebai | Shashai | Sharai |
| H4367 | H8343 | H8298 |

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