

# GRACEPOINT CHURCH

## Weekly Devotional

### How to read the Bible without doing harm

By Ian France

#### Scripture

Ezra 10:1-4, 9-15

Open your mind and heart as you read the passage of Scripture aloud and then again quietly to yourself. Listen for God's word to you.

#### Observation

##### **Ezra 10:1-4;**

Ezra confessed the people's sin on their behalf with heartfelt sorrow. The people who were present were so moved by the conviction of their sin and their need to confess and repent that they wept bitterly. Shechaniah, one of the men present with Ezra at this time, recognised the severity of the nation's sin, but he also realised that the brokenness the people were experiencing was the work of the Holy Spirit amongst them. So, he told Ezra, there was still hope for Israel in spite of their sin. The suggestion that the people put away the foreign wives they had married and the children resulting from their union came from Shechaniah as he encouraged Ezra to take action to rectify the matter. He told Ezra it was his responsibility to put things right. Shechaniah proposed the people make a covenant to put their repentance into action, rather than just speaking words. At the time, divorce was permitted (Deuteronomy 24:1) and there had been many broken marriages, but for another reason. Many Jewish wives had been set aside in favour of pagan women. Shechaniah advised that the children, born of these marriages, also be put away. This left both the pagan wives and the children in potentially dire straits without provision. Nothing is said about the men continuing to support them. However, it seems that not many of these wives did have children (Ezra 10:44)

##### **10:9-15**

Ezra called the people together and within three days they assembled in Jerusalem. They sat in the open square in front of the temple, shivering in the rain. The fact that they were prepared to respond so promptly to Ezra's call, and to gather in such adverse circumstances, is another sign of the working of the Holy Spirit. Ezra reminded the people they had sinned, adding to the guilt of the nation. He gave a clear call for them to both confess and repent. With one voice, the people agreed with him and asked Ezra for the

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time to make the situation right. However, a few men, who are named, did not agree with Ezra's suggestions. The text does not give their reasons. Maybe they saw the measures as too harsh; or maybe they did not want a delay in rectifying the situation.

### Icebreaker:

Many people don't read the Old Testament, thinking it is irrelevant in this day and age. What is your favourite Old Testament story? Why is it special to you?

### Application

- How has reading the Bible over the time you have been a believer, shaped and guided you in the way you follow Christ? How has it moulded you into who you are today?
- Christians don't follow the Bible; we read and study the Bible and we follow Jesus: What would you say to someone who said they do not read the Old Testament because they believe the God portrayed there is different to the God of the New Testament. Why do you think they say this? Do you agree/disagree? Does Jesus bring the two aspects of Scripture together in a cohesive whole for you? How? If asked, who would you say you follow – Scripture or Jesus? Why?
- Christians read the Bible through the eye-glasses of Jesus' story: What filters do you use when you read the Bible – age; race; gender; life-experience, etc? What do you think of Ezra's command to put aside the pagan wives and children at this time? Was he right – or not? Why do you respond in this way? What other alternatives were available to Ezra and the people which would have been in line with Jesus' way? Do any of the points you raise apply to life today?
- Christians read the Bible understanding that the line between good and evil doesn't run between people but through people: How could this statement alter your opinion of the people around you, or, perhaps those you see on the news or social media? Can you see good in all; and evil in all? Choose a couple of people you often see in the press. What good can you see in them? What bad can you see in them? How does this discussion influence your overall view of these people and any others who come to mind?

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- Gracepoint, how can we become a sanctuary, a place of acceptance, for all people no matter their background? How can we be Jesus to all with whom we connect? How can you?
- How can the group help you with the struggles you have mentioned during this session?

### Prayer

Pray for one another in regard to the issues that have been raised during your discussion time, and in regard to other needs of the group.

### Service

Look for opportunities this week to 'be Jesus' to those with whom you come into contact. What difference does it make to these relationships?

### Bibliography

<https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/ezra-10/>

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