

## Ezra 9-10 – Thursday, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017

**Ezra 9** -- 1 When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. 2 For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass."

- The chapter begins with the leaders coming to Ezra and apprising him of a very serious problem among the people of Israel.
- The problem was they had not separated themselves from the abominable people of the land as God had commanded them.
- If this weren't bad enough, it seems that the ones who had been at the forefront in doing this were none other than the priests.

- In order to better understand the seriousness of this, we first need to know the difference between sinning and trespassing.
- Simply put, trespasses are about what we do, whereas sin is about whom we are, such that, a trespass is willful disobedience.
- In other words, we know that what we are doing is transgressing/trespassing God's law, and such was the case here in Ezra.

Deuteronomy 7:1-4 (NKJV) — 1 "When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, 2 and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. 3 Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. 4 For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly.

- Here in Deuteronomy as with other places in scripture, we're told the why behind the "what" of God's command concerning this.
- Namely, that of God's promise that the Savior of the world would come from the pure bloodline of the Jewish people yet future.
- It's for this reason that Ezra reacts in the way that he does, as we'll see next. Simply put, Ezra knows how serious this really is.

3 So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished.

- For Ezra to respond in such a dramatic way speaks to how he was in an entirely different world in where he was at spiritually.
- It's important to understand that for someone to tear their clothes and shave their head was the ultimate expression of grief.
- This because, the tearing of ones clothes was a symbolic gesture of how that their heart had been broken and torn into pieces.

- I can't even begin to imagine how Ezra must have felt receiving this report after risking his life and many others returning there.
- For him to sit down astonished seems to indicate that he was so shaken by this that he couldn't stand, he needed to sit down.
- Please know that Ezra is not reacting like this to the sin of the world; he's reacting like this because of the sin of God's people.

4 Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. 5 At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God.

- I find it most interesting that Ezra's posture is that of prayer and fasting concerning this grievous sin on the part of his people.
- Notice his mention of those who had been carried away captive in verse four. I point this out because of the horrible irony of it.
- Specifically that the very reason they had been carried away captive was because of the very transgression that still committed.

- There's something else here that I want to point out before we read what Ezra's prayer was, and it has to do with his posture.
- We're told in verse five he fell on his knees and spread out his hands to the Lord his God as he offered up his prayer to Him.
- The reason I point this out is because it speaks to an important principle when it comes to not only when we pray but how.

I like how one commentator put it, "The Bible has enough prayer not on the knees to show us that it isn't required, but it also has enough prayer on the knees to show us that it is good."

6 And I said: "O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. 7 Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as it is this day. 8 And now for a little while grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage. 9 For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem.

- In order to better understand Ezra's heart in his prayer, we first need to know that he saw the temple for the first time in his life.
- In other words, Ezra was so thankful and grateful to the Lord for bringing His people back from captivity to rebuild the temple.
- Then, when he sees how God's people have repaid His mercy and grace, Ezra finds himself utterly ashamed and humiliated.

10 And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, 11 which You commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their impurity. 12 Now therefore, do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons; and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your children forever.' 13 And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such deliverance as this, 14 should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor? 15 O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day. Here we are before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this!"

- What I find interesting about Ezra's prayer is he doesn't appeal to God in any other way than His mercy, grace and promise.
- In other words, he's not defending or excusing the people for their transgression, rather, he's pleading with God for His mercy.
- What Ezra prays here is similar to what David wrote in the Psalms as it relates to the goodness of God in keeping His promise.

Psalm 119:49–50 (NKJV) — 49 Remember the word to Your servant, Upon which You have caused me to hope. 50 This is my comfort in my affliction, For Your word has given me life.

**Ezra 10** -- 1 Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly. 2 And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, "We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this. 3 Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.

- The chapter begins by telling us how that the people confessed and forsook they trespass against God and wept bitterly for it.
- It seems that God hearkened unto the voice of Ezra's cry, so much so, that the people repented and trembled at God's Word.
- Would to God that we would tremble at the Word of our God that we would be numbered amongst those who are faithful to it.

4 Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it." 5 Then Ezra arose, and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So they swore an oath. 6 Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and when he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity. 7 And they issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the descendants of the captivity, that they must gather at Jerusalem, 8 and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the instructions of the leaders and elders, all his property would be confiscated, and he himself would be separated from the assembly of those from the captivity. 9 So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth of the month; and all the people sat in the open square of the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of heavy rain. 10 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. 11 Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives." 12 Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, "Yes! As you have said, so we must do. 13 But there are many people; it is the season for heavy rain, and we are not able to stand outside. Nor is this the work of one or two days, for there are many of us who have transgressed in this matter. 14 Please, let the leaders of our entire assembly stand; and let all those in our cities who have taken pagan wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and judges of their cities, until the fierce wrath of our God is turned away from us in this matter."

- I suppose you could say that this is a revival in every sense of the word, and it came about vis-à-vis both prayer and fasting.
- Those who study revivals throughout history have come to the conclusion that an awakening has never come in any other way.
- Dr. J. Edwin Orr is one such man who has written extensively concerning the evangelical awakenings and revivals in the past.

In his book *The Second Evangelical Awakening*, Dr. J. Edwin Orr quoted the observations of a high-ranking army officer upon the work of the Spirit in his Scottish town: "Those of you who are ease have little conception of how terrifying a sight it is when the Holy Spirit is pleased to open a man's eyes to see the real state of heart. ... Men who were thought to be, and who thought themselves to be good, religious people ... have been led to search into the foundation upon which they were resting, and have found all rotten, that they were self-satisfied, resting on their own goodness, and not upon Christ. Many turned from open sin to lives of holiness, some weeping for joy for sins forgiven."

In another of his writings Orr says, "Confession of sins is a neglected doctrine. It only comes into its rightful place in times of revival, when the Holy Spirit comes in doubly-convicting power and makes it impossible for the erring believer to have any peace of mind until the wrong is confessed whenever necessary."

15 Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite gave them support. 16 Then the descendants of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain heads of the fathers' households, were set apart by the fathers' households, each of them by name; and they sat down on the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. 17 By the first day of the first month they finished questioning all the men who had taken pagan wives. 18 And among the sons of the priests who had taken pagan wives the following were found of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. 19 And they gave their promise that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they presented a ram of the flock as their trespass offering.

- This is interesting for a number of reasons, one of which is great effort is made to have enough time to do this in the right way.
- Though they were pagan wives with children, these were still families needing to be cared for and given an opportunity to stay.
- In other words, if they were genuine in their desire to forsake their religion and serve the God of Israel, they could stay there.

20 Also of the sons of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah; 21 of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah; 22 of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasa. 23 Also of the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (the same is Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. 24 Also of the singers: Eliashib; and of the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri. 25 And others of Israel: of the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, Jeziel, Malchiah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malchijah, and Benaiah; 26 of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Eliah; 27 of the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza; 28 of the sons of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai; 29 of the sons of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Ramoth; 30 of the sons of Pahath-Moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh; 31 of the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, 32 Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah; 33 of the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei; 34 of the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, 35 Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluh, 36 Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, 37 Mattaniah, Mattenai, Jaasai, 38 Bani, Binnui, Shimei, 39 Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, 40 Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, 41 Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, 42 Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph; 43 of the sons of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah. 44 All these had taken pagan wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children.

- The chapter ends by listing for us what seems to be about 114 of these pagan wives who refused to accept the God of Israel.
- As such, they were to be put away, or they would be guilty of what we know in the New Testament as being unequally yoked.
- To be unequally yoked is to be a Christian who is married to a non-Christian, which if that's your situation, don't get divorced.

1 Corinthians 7:12–17 (NKJV) — 12 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. 13 And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. 15 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. 16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? 17 But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.