

## **Bibles???**

### **The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority**

Good evening church, we are going to continue our study through the book of Ezra – we are going to do chapters 9 and 10 – and with that we will conclude the book of Ezra.

Let's pray...

It's been two weeks since we were in the book of Ezra –

I want to do a little review before we get started.

After spending 70 years in Babylon, the nation of Israel had been in the process of restoration – that is what the book of Ezra is all about.

And there were three main characters that were involved in the restoration.

For the first six chapters, we saw God lift up Zerubbabel – he led the first group of exiles out of Babylon – and he was in charge of the rebuilding of the temple. The temple was rebuilt in 515 BC.

We also have Nehemiah –

he was working around the same time that Ezra was – Nehemiah was responsible for restoring the city walls.

We were finally introduced to Ezra in chapter seven – Ezra was a priest / scribe – meaning that he knew the word of God and also taught the Word to others.

He shows up in Israel around 60 years after the temple had been rebuilt –

In our last study, we saw that he led another group – much smaller than the group that Zerubbabel led – however, most of Ezra's group consisted of workers for the temple.

Ezra's main responsibility was to restore the spiritual life of the nation –

After all, Ezra was a priest – a descendant of Aaron / but his function was more of a scribe – this means that he carefully studied the word of God and then taught the Word of God to others so that they may be able to apply it.

And that is exactly what we are going to see in these last two chapters.

**[Ezr 9:1-15 NKJV] 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."**

After arriving in Jerusalem, Ezra started taking inventory of the spiritual condition of Israel.

And he learns that they started intermarrying with the ites that lived in the area.

They had begun to compromise on the word of God –

Remember – they just spent 70 years in exile for rebelling against God.

And one of the reasons for their captivity is that they worshipped other gods – and some of it began as they started intermarrying with these ites that worshipped those same gods.

One would think that they would have learned their lesson...

God's command was clear –

**[Deu 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.**

This was not an issue of interracial marriage – this was an issue of what “god” you follow.

The seed needed to stay pure because it was through that “seed” of the Jews that the Messiah was going to come.

In 2 Corinthians 6, we have a similar warning -

Paul warns the believer to not be unequally yoked with nonbelievers.

This doesn't mean that we shun nonbelievers or that we cannot have friends that are unbelievers.

After all, God wants us to be a light in the world.

**But in a strong, close, binding relationship like marriage, God wants two people to be of the same mind, worshipping the same God.**

In verse 1,2 we also see that the priests and the leaders were doing it as well.

The very people that were supposed to provide the example were demonstrating to the people that it was ok.

I'm going to guess that the priests who were teaching God's Word before Ezra's arrival were skipping over the parts that described their own disobedience.

**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.**

Ezra was not the one who had disobeyed God and married one of the ites – yet we see him in here verse three grieving.

The tearing of garments to show grief is common in scripture – but Ezra takes it to another level here as he pulls out some of his hair.

When you read the book of Nehemiah – he faces a similar problem with people intermarrying – but Nehemiah rips the hair of the guilty – instead of his own.

I think that this clearly demonstrates that Ezra loved these people and he is heartbroken by what he just found out.

**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.**

Those who trembled at the words of the God of Israel were those that were serious about following the Lord.

These were those that were also horrified at the sin of their community.

**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. 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.**

Notice how Ezra prays – he is not praying, “I’m ashamed of these backsliders or I am ashamed at what these sinners are doing” –

Ezra had just arrived in Jerusalem – he didn’t partake in what the people were doing.

Yet he knew that because they were bound together in the same covenant before God, their iniquities were in fact his.

**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.**

Ezra remembers that there are indeed consequences to sin – to those that rebel against God.

It was their ancestors’ sins that had resulted in the Babylonians captivity.

Paul provides us with the same warning in the book of Romans.

**[Rom 1:18-21 NKJV] 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in**

unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown [it] to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible [attributes] are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, [even] His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify [Him] as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

And if you continue reading the chapter – we see the consequences of rejecting God.

Back to Ezra

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.

Ezra is reflecting here on the goodness of God.

Even though they had rebelled against God – God is the One who allowed them to return back to the Promised Land and rebuild the temple.

God is the one who is demonstrating His grace over them.

**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.'**

Despite God's grace and mercy in bringing the people back into the land and giving them mercy before the kings of Persia, the people have gone on to turn their back on God's commands.

In particular, they have turned their backs on God's commands not to intermarry with people who are not following God.

**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?**

In his prayer, Ezra knew that God could not go back on His forever promise to Israel.

But he also recognized that Israel deserved to die out as a nation for their continual rebellion against God.

Paul did something similar in Romans 7 –

**[Rom 7:18-20 NKJV] 18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but [how] to perform what is good I do not find. 19 For the good that I will [to do], I do not do; but the evil I will not [to do], that I practice. 20 Now if I do what I will not [to do], it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.**

Church,

This isn't a false humility; it's magnifying God's grace.

You see, Ezra could identify with the sinners because he believed that but for God's grace, he could be doing what they were doing.

It wasn't that he was better than they were – It wasn't that he was good. It was only by God's grace – and that is how Ezra could identify with them.

**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!"**

In this powerful prayer by Ezra – notice that he didn't make excuses, he didn't try to rationalize the sin of Israel, he didn't offer empty promises – he simply prayed in humility and appealed for mercy.

Now – we go on to chapter 10.

Before we continue – I want to make sure to first stress that this chapter in no way addresses the subject of divorce and remarriage.

This was a unique situation – it doesn't set a precedent for Israel or for you and me.

I cannot stress this enough –

For believers that are married to a nonbeliever – Paul addresses this in 1 Corinthians 7

**[1Co 7:12-15 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.

[Ezr 10:1-17 NKJV] 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.

Now, make a note that it was Shechaniah that proposed this – not Ezra.

He proposed that they should divorce their pagan wives.

That is what is meant by “put away”

This was not an easy decision – fathers were going to be separated from their children and their wives –

But we must remember that sometimes our sin results in problems for which are no easy solutions.

Such is the case here – to allow the people to continue in their mixed marriages would have made matters worse – it would have condoned such behavior and would draw many Jews into religious syncretism right at the time that purity and separation were essential.

**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.**

The counsel of Shechaniah seemed good to Ezra, so he immediately called upon the people to swear an oath to do according to this word. Significantly, Ezra began with the leaders; he expected them to make things right with God first.

**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.**

Once again we see Ezra fasting before the decision is announced – he is seeking God's guidance – knowing that it is a difficult decision.

**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.

Ezra and the leaders gather the people – they told them to show up or else.

**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."**

Ezra is calling them to repentance –

He is calling them to “separate”

The idea of being separate is at the root of what it means to be holy.

**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."**

The people ask for time – Ezra wanted them to take care of it right there – but because there were so many parties involved, they come to the conclusion that it was going to take time to fix.

**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.**

It took them three months to straighten it out.

You guys can go ahead and read the names of those who took pagan wives – if you count them all, there was a total of 113.

17 priests, 10 Levites and 86 others.

Some might be thinking - All that fuss over about a hundred people? Yeah

- because a little leaven leavens the whole lump.

Especially since many of those involved were leaders.

Church, again – I want to remind you that this sin was partially responsible for the Babylonian captivity.

And now, they are having to deal with it again.

And guess what? They will deal with it two more times in the book of Nehemiah.

This should be a warning to us that if God has given you victory over a particularly difficult sin - praise God.

But always remember not to let your guard down.

**(1 Pe 5:8 NKJV) Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.**

If God has delivered you from a particular sin, don't think that you'll never ever do that sin again.

Let's pray...

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Santa Cruz