



Lesson 6 April 10th, 2021

Ezra: Faith and Action Preacher

Study Scripture – Ezra 10:1-12

Background Scripture – Ezra 9-10

Key Verse:

“My God, I am ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God, for our wrongful deeds have risen above our heads, and our guilt has grown even to the heavens”.

Ezra 9:6

INTRODUCTION

Difficult is an adjective very often found with the noun “recovery” or “restoration”. Especially so when a situation has reached ‘rock bottom’ and one’s only option is the dreaded ‘start from scratch’. Oftentimes, the road back is an uphill climb and ‘setbacks’ are to be expected along the way.

The ‘seventy year’ exile of the Southern Kingdom of Judah in Babylon had ended as prophesied by Isaiah, but the manner of the release was still remarkable. God took the initiative (and God always has to take the initiative with bringing those who have grown cold and have been under captivity to sin) and a Gentile, the Persian king Darius was “**stirred up**” and ordered by Jehovah to facilitate the rebuilding of ‘The Temple’ in Jerusalem. The king complied, militarily, politically and economically and as a result, in a matter of months after the king’s decree a vanguard group of Jews arrived in Jerusalem from Babylon, (538 BC).

This was a rare historical event. The exile of any nation usually marks the end of that nation. Captors are never gracious, magnanimous or unwise to allow the vanquished to regroup, restart and very likely exact revenge. Difference here is God’s people were the captives!

It should be obvious to you that we are now therefore looking at an area of truth with which you will have to struggle a great deal. Your experience will likely never equip you to easily deal with this passage for the truth will as one writer says, “**overrun your experience**”. The fact is however that this is truth, a difficult area of truth, that we will and must look at, and the problem for us is that we can fake it, bypass it or try to be honest as we teach about it.

The fact of life is that we constantly experience pressures to turn our back on God and instead follow the attractive and seductive offers that the world makes to us all the time.

Our Study therefore makes us look at the weapons with which we have to use to fight this constant pressure to compromise in small things of evil and wickedness that can lead to very large and serious outcomes.

We have in this life to look carefully at a Cost- benefit analysis, where we look at immediate benefits versus long-term costs as we go through life. Remember that Jesus as recorded in Matthew 6:24 warned, ***“You cannot serve both God and money”***.

So ask yourself the question, ***“With what would replace loyalty to the Lord for you and me?”***

Note carefully that this is not a question only for the so-called “ordinary folks” but it's a question for the leaders of the people for they were the ones who helped get the people of Israel into a great mess. But now that the people of God were in trouble it called for strong people of God who had faith and who were prepared to act without compromising, going to God for direction and confirmation of what He had always taught.

As we study remember that these strong people of faith and action already knew what God instructed. So we too should know what God has instructed and not try to make excuses for what seems to be minor but are in reality very significant deviations from the teachings of Scripture.

So here is a model for revival in the body of Christ.

But whether you are at the top or the bottom or in the middle note what one writer states: ***“You cannot trust and derive life from financial advantage, and trust and derive life from God at the same time. Fame, success, sex, education, even family can all be idolatry if we are not careful. Recall the Lord's words, hard to hear but important:***

“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (Matthew 10:37).

Our Lord is a jealous God who calls us to put him first so that he can bless us. He alone is worthy of first place, of worship as God.

The attention we gave to gaining pleasure can draw us into little compromises that over time turn us into people we never intended to be. The thrill of success and competition, whatever the cost, may change our hearts in ways that will horrify us at some point. What might we learn ... The seductions of idolatry are not confined to their ancient forms.

The benefits of choosing a voice other than God's are immediate. The consequences come in the long term. So we fool ourselves by thinking about what we get now and not considering where it's leading. Judas became a traitor by first being a small- stakes crook.

The weapon that we use to fight back against spiritual compromise is, again, confession, or agreeing with what the Bible says is true about ourselves. It's saying out loud, repeatedly, that we turn from what's wrong. If we learn to confess sin as we are instructed, we'll be strengthened and set on the right path as we really love to be”.



So we will be looking at unfaithfulness to God and the most powerful weapon that people of faith have which is a confession of sin. To use this weapon for our survival we have to clearly and with great thought name “sin” when we come into the presence of God.

THE CONTEXT

We should take the history of Israel very seriously for it has relevance to us. Israel had sinned. The prophet Ezekiel describes what they had done and what **would** happen. He wrote:

Thus says the Lord God: This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and countries all around her.

She has rebelled against My judgments by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against My statutes more than the countries that are all around her; for they have refused My judgments, and they have not walked in My statutes.

Therefore thus says the LORD GOD: because you have multiplied disobedience more than the nations that are all around you, have not walked in My statutes nor kept My judgments nor even done according to the judgments of the nation that are all around you;

Therefore thus says the LORD GOD: Indeed I, even I, am against you and will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations.

And I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again, because of all your abominations.

Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat your fathers; and I will execute judgments among you, and all of you who remain I will scatter to all the winds”.

‘Therefore, as I live’ says the LORD GOD, ‘surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will also diminish you; My eyes will not spare, nor will I have any pity.

One third of you shall die of the pestilence and be consumed with famine in your midst; and one third shall fall by the sword all around you; and I will scatter another third to all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them”.

We are looking therefore at an extremely powerful series of judgments that came because of the disobedience of the nation of Israel and Judah. We ask, Will they go down that road again? But because of His great mercy and His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob God promised that He would leave a remnant which would return to the Land.

The first group of returnees found the city of Jerusalem in ruins; only the ground on which the Temple stood remained. The city walls were broken down; piles of rubble everywhere; it looked a lot like the way the Babylonians left it seventy years earlier.

Judah was constituted as a theocracy and national life necessarily revolved around the Temple and the priesthood. A confirmed, qualified and undefiled priesthood was a foundational first step to nation building. As the leaders tried to rally and motivate the returnees to the very formidable task of re-establishing the nation, it became public that some of the first arrivals, including priests and Levites had married some of the local women.



We recall that when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and Judah some of the poorer people were left in the land and they lived among pagan people that had moved into the now desolate land of Judah. There was therefore a religious mixture of Judaism and paganism. Some of these people developed into what is called the Samaritans for that group accepted the five books of Moses and nothing else. The Jews regarded them as hated enemies. But the land was filled with ignorance. The prophet Isaiah predicted that when Messiah came, He would go into Galilee of the Gentiles, a land of darkness so that He would bring light to help the people.

Historically, under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian Empire sacked Jerusalem and exiled the people of Judah in 586 BC. Eventually, the Persian King Cyrus defeated Babylon. He released Jewish exiles to return home to Jerusalem in 538 BC for the express purpose of rebuilding the temple (Ezra 10:1). Following that first wave of returning exiles in 538 BC was a second led by Ezra in 458 BC (7:7, 13). He desired to restore the people to a state of faithful adherence to God's law (7:25–27). The third and final wave of exiles returned to Jerusalem in 444 BC, led by Nehemiah (Neh. 2:1–9).

The first returnees under Zerubbabel first rebuilt the altar then laid the foundation of the Temple but a year later the construction was halted in the face of opposition (534 BC). Construction resumed fourteen years later, and the Temple construction was finally completed in 515 BC, (Ezra 6).

Sixty years later Ezra with imperial power and authority and a contingent just under two thousand arrived in Jerusalem after a nine-hundred-mile journey from Babylonia. Three pillars of national life were lost in the final deportation from Judah in 586 BC, the Temple, sacrifices and priesthood. The physical components of the nation were essentially restored, however there was need for social, spiritual and moral restoration.

God's people were specifically warned against intermarriage with pagans due to the spiritual threat of such unions. During their formative years in Egypt, they were kept apart from the Egyptians. They were strictly forbidden from intermarriage with Canaanites due to their idolatry and related abominable practices. Now as the nation's spiritual needs were about to be addressed under Ezra, marriage with pagans became an issue. Consequently, a wrenching problem immediately faced Ezra and the rebuilding community.

Note that the prohibition was not based on any racial or ethnic enmity. Rather, God warned in Deuteronomy 7:4 that foreign faiths "*will turn away thy son from following me*", (2 Cor. 6:14–18). The underlying issue was purity of religion. All had to convert to Judaism to become part of the Covenant and be accepted.

Yet even as they returned from exile, the men of Judah were marrying pagan women! If these men were divorcing Jewish wives as well, the result was abuse of divorce laws and resulting hardship for the former wives (Mal 2:13–16; Matthew 19:1–9).



Clearly there was a crisis with intermarriage for the returning Jews had to separate themselves from the uncleanness of the nations. Israel was defined as a holy nation connected to the holiness of their Lord. They had a special and unique relationship with God and their identity reflected this devotion to God and their close association with the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. The Law had made provision for people from the pagan community to come into the nation of Israel, but like Rahab from Gentile Jericho and Ruth from pagan Moab and others, they had to accept the stipulations of the Law and reject worship of other gods and practices of idolatry.

Ezra's reaction to the people's disobedience serves as the subject of today's Lesson. We nowadays tend to treat the law of God very casually and we like to think that there are minor as well as major matters of the Law and we have the right to pick and choose between which ones we want to follow, given that we seem to think that "small things" do not offend the holiness of God.

But as we have been warned in Scripture, ***"the little foxes spoil the vine"*** and therefore we should be much more cautious in how we behave. We do not want, despite our protestations about the great work we did for God, to hear the words from Jesus on the Day of Judgment, ***I never knew you.***

Ezra was a priest by genealogy and a scribe by profession and commissioned by God (Ezra 7:6). He was a scholar, learned in the sacred Law. The word 'skilled' (7:12), suggests a quick grasp and acquaintance with complex materials which came from devoted study of the Law. He attributed his return to Jerusalem as a response to the Word of God.

Artaxerxes, the then Persian ruler, under the direction of God, issued a decree authorizing the return of Jewish exiles and accredited Ezra to teach and admonish Jewish law among his fellow Jews in the province (7:25). The king marked his decree with a large official donation to the rebuilding effort and called on Jews remaining in the land to add their contributions (8:25).

Godly Israelites in Babylon who were aware of God's promises of repatriation must have wondered how it could possibly come about; where was a deliverer going to come from?

God's faithfulness is clearly a theme in Ezra. We see God's protection of His people in Babylonia (Esther) and three Persian kings officially, 'voluntarily' repatriate Jews to Jerusalem, return articles taken from the Temple in Jerusalem and actually financing the Temple reconstruction. Truly *"The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He pleases.* (Prov. 21:1).

THE TEXT

Let us remember that Ezra had been sent by God to strengthen worship in the Temple and improve the nation's fellowship with God. Remember that we have been told in Ezra 7:10 ***"Ezra had set his heart to study the law of God, and to do it"***.



After he set about delivering the order of the King to the officials in the land, he was faced with a terrible situation for the people had been simply starting the whole mess that had broken the strength of the nation before and led to their dispersion. Now after 70 years of captivity it appears that they had not learned a thing. They were back to their old ways.

One writer warns the self-confident believers:

“The flesh never changes. No matter how long you walk in the Spirit, you will never get to the place where you cannot revert to the worst you ever were, if you depart from dependence upon the Spirit of God”.

Some people of God had to bring Ezra up-to-date and warn him of the true conditions on the ground.

So if you are people of God do not keep your eyes shut at what is happening around you. You are responsible for what happens even if you are not doing the evil yourself.

Read very carefully Ezekiel Chapter 18.

The news that Israelites including priests and Levites were intermarrying with pagans shocked Ezra and the god-fearing among the returned exiles and cast a pall over the entire community. The implications of this behavior could be a major setback to the aspirations of the community. They knew from their history that idolatry was the natural end to this practice, and which was a great affront to the Holy God.

Ezra’s response was an immediate and wholehearted prayer of confession and repentance, as other like-minded identified with and supported his prayers, (Ezra 9).

Verse 1. Ezra was a recognized leader in the community, and he led by example with the proper response to the crisis.

... praying and making confession ... an acknowledgement of sin is a first step in repentance and seeking forgiveness.

...confession... is to agree with God that specifically named acts, thoughts are wrong and an offence to God.

... weeping and prostrating himself ... the sincerity of his distress over Judah’s sins is emphasized by the intensifying verbs used to describe his actions (Nehemiah 1:3–6). Ezra’s physical posture matched his spiritual posture before the Lord. Both body and spirit were marked by brokenness and sorrow.

Prostrating himself means to fall down before the Lord (Deut. 9:18,25). The normal physical position for prayer was standing with eyes and hands lifted to heaven. On some occasions kneeling was a way to show intensity (9:5). Prostration was an even further act of humility.

The house of God refers to the Temple that had been rebuilt after Solomon’s temple was destroyed in the Babylonian conquest (2 Chronicles 36:19; Ezra 3:7–13; 6:13–18). Construction



was completed in 515 BC, and this Second Temple was later expanded by King Herod and stood until the Romans destroyed it in A.D. 70.

... a very great congregation of men and women and children... people need good leaders and especially so in the 'kingdom' and even more so in the area of repentance.

A very large assembly, men, women and children gathered. The small group that came and reported the sin to Ezra (9:4) had swelled to a large group of all age groups (Neh. 8:2). Usually, only men above the age of thirteen would have been a part of this kind of group. One wonders if these particular Jewish women and children had been impacted by the taking of foreign wives (Mal. 2:10-16).

...for the people wept bitterly... Ezra's humility and confession sparked repentance among the returnees. Whether ignorance or apathy had allowed the sin to develop during these many years is uncertain, but God's word revealed the covenantal issue.

Here Ezra's own conviction and contrition became an example for others to gather before the Lord and weep over their sins. When Ezra, a scribe, a scholar, a man in authority under the king, so deeply lamented the public corruptions, they, many of the men, women, and children (v. 1) concluded that they were indeed very grievous.

Verse 2. *... Shecaniah ...* This was one of the sons of a guilty offender who is listed in 10:26 and he had a repentant heart. It is plausible that this man overcame personal and familial shame to speak up and not attempt to cover up his family's sin.

... We have been unfaithful ... He acknowledged his family's sin and that of the returnees. This term regularly denotes the violation of a covenant relationship or other expected behavior in the Old Testament (1 Chronicles 5:25).

Marital unfaithfulness is a frequent analogy regarding Israel's relationship with God, with Israel being the adulterous wife (Isa. 62:5; Jer. 3:8; Ezek. 16:22-38).

married foreign women... women not part of the covenant people. Israel had been repeatedly warned that *the people of the land* of Canaan would lead them into apostasy (Deuteronomy 7:1-4; Joshua 23:12-13).

Whether these particular wives were guilty of such a thing is unknown, but their attitude can be deduced. However, the sad example of Solomon the wise king whose foreign wives *"turned away his heart after other gods"* (1 Kings 11:4) should have been a grave warning in the time after the exile.

Ezra's contemporary Nehemiah reminded the people of Solomon's failure, exhorting them not to suffer the same fate (Nehemiah 13:26-27).



...*from the peoples of the land*... in pre-exilic days this referred to the Jewish population, but in this context and period it refers to the population of the Persian province 'Beyond the River'.

...*yet now there is hope*... Ezra's teaching ministry and actions kindled a corporate contrition. YHWH's promises and merciful character kindled hope for:

1. Forgiveness
2. Fulfillment of future promises
3. Assurance of His personal presence (II Chr. 20:9)

Hope is always grounded in the possibility of God's mercy. After a moral failure or personal tragedy, hope exists because, as King David learned firsthand, God is '*good, and doest good*' (Psalm 119:68).

Hope grounded in God's goodness led others to write of God's being gracious, slow to anger, and full of mercy, (Psalms 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2).

Note, a repentant heart is what makes *hope* possible for right relations with God to be restored. God's patience with His people is demonstrated time and again throughout the Old Testament. The prophets often invoked past episodes of God's gracious deliverance in order to motivate the people toward obedience. Ezra reminded the remnant in Jerusalem that "*God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve*" (Ezra 9:13).

Verse 3. *Now therefore* signals a step forward from the sins of the past and present, as defined in
Ezra 10:2.

... *let us make a covenant* ... in one way this is a strange statement. They already had a covenant with God. However, possibly through ignorance, these returnees did not know the Torah. With Ezra's teaching (7:23), they became aware of their transgression and now wanted a Covenant renewal.

... *put away all the wives* ... this suggestion from Shechaniah is drastic and may appear cruel to modern readers.

Some might wonder if God really wanted the men to send *away* their *wives* and children, considering Deuteronomy 21:10–14.

But in the days following the return from Babylon, the people were very aware of how unfaithfulness had led to their removal from the Promised Land.

Foreign women could very well lead their husbands back into idolatry, as had happened to King Solomon. Thus, the threat the foreign wives posed was too great to ignore. The people had to be intent on being holy in order to please God.



We should never forget that according to Deuteronomy 24:1 divorce was permitted in Israel. But Malachi 2:10-16 states quite clearly that broken marriages seem to have been the norm and it was a scandal that many Jewish wives were abandoned in favor of heathen woman. One writer states:

“While divorce is always hateful to God (Malachi 2:16), and a witness to human ‘hardness of heart’ (Mark 10:5), the situation described in Ezra 9 and 10 was a classic example of one in which the lesser of two evils had to be chosen. If a serious reason for divorce could ever exist, this had a better claim than most to come within that category”. (Kidner)

Marriages made between some prohibited persons, as suppose, between a father and his daughter, a brother and a sister, are not only unlawful, but void marriages, and *ipso facto*, null by the political laws of civil nations. And therefore these marriages with idolatrous and heathen women, being expressly and severely forbidden by God, might well be disannulled”. (Poole)

The prophet Malachi gives us an insight into the recurring slippage by the leaders and the men of Israel and we know God took this foolishness very seriously and His sword would be taken out again.

We should note that God’s covenant people were not to mistreat non-Israelites who lived among them, quite the opposite (Leviticus 19:33–34; 23:22)! But treating non-Israelites with kindness is not in the same category as intermarriage. The extraordinary circumstances the people faced called for extraordinary action.

... *my lord* ... Shechaniah referred to Ezra deferentially as *my lord*. This acknowledged Ezra’s authority to decide and lead the people based on what he believed was right.

Ezra, after all, was both student and teacher of the Law of Moses. His conclusions on this matter were well-informed.

... *those that tremble* [those who fear] *at the commandment* ... reverence and awe were given to God’s words as if God himself were present. God helps those “... of a contrite spirit. ...*but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.* (Isaiah 66:2).

... *And let it be done according to the law...* in view is *the law* that forbade certain marital unions.

This is a recognition that there were divine guidelines (Deut. 7:1-5); that Covenant has requirements

(v. 4), as well as benefits.

Notable people accepted into the covenant community and eventually married into this community included Salmon who married Rahab, a Canaanite and Boaz who married Ruth, a Moabite. These two women are honored as ancestors of Jesus Himself (Joshua 2:1; Ruth 4:10; Matthew 1:5). But the captivity from which the Jews had returned was a vivid reminder of the dangers of idolatry.



It is difficult to hold the position that some non-Jewish wives were exceptions to the rule, like Rahab and Ruth. The prophet Ezekiel reminded Israel that their father Abraham was an Amorite, and their mother Sarah was a Hittite and so God would never rule out having people from a pagan background brought into the covenant community. Similarly, Abraham sent back to his homeland for a wife for his son Isaac even though it seems she was not a firm belief at that stage in Yahweh. But she knew that she was going to a different kind of community and she accepted it. Her life showed that she accepted being part of the “promise” and a child of Yahweh.

God always wanted Israel to be a light to the nations and to actively work to bring the pagans into an understanding of who Yahweh was.

But the Law existed because Israel was to be a religious community and it was to be defined as in an exclusively close relation to Yahweh. In the book of Ruth we are told that Naomi’s other daughter in law went back to her mother’s house because of Naomi’s bad advice instead of following the teaching and exposure to Yahweh she had been given. Instead of returning to her mother she should have gone along with Ruth and becoming part of the covenant community.

It is also to be noted when we look at the life of David that many of his mighty men who helped establish his kingdom had pagan names and so we know that those were people who had come into the community of Israel and accepted the Lord God as their God. David himself acknowledged this fact. We therefore also understand that God had never turned aside people who wanted to join the covenant community but insisted that they follow the process established in the Law. Relatively few cases were detailed in Scripture, but we know that there were many people that came into the community. We may note that Rahab and Ruth professed allegiance to God in both word and action (Joshua 2:11; Ruth 1:16).

Verse 4. *Arise ...* we can only imagine the overwhelmingly emotional toll of separating from one’s wife and children. The difficulty of the demand is what brought forth the strong imperative *Arise!*

-This marks the beginning of the shift from conviction to action on the part of the leaders.

... is your responsibility... For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments. (7:10).

And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily, (7:21).

... we will be with you... when leaders have to act in difficult situations it is good, they have the support of the congregation. Too often leaders stall to make difficult decisions because they fear a lack of support.



Verse 5. ... *made the leading priests, the Levites* ... it was going to be a wrenching decision and so Ezra made sure that the chief priests, the Levites and all Israel were on the same page. Opposition to the task ahead had to be absolutely minimized (Ezra 10:15)!

So the leaders and lay people made a covenant with God to “*put away all the wives, and such as are born of them*” (10:3).

Verse 6. During this emotional day, *Ezra* withdrew to be alone in the dwelling of *Johanan*. That man and his father, *Eliashib*, were Levites (Nehemiah 12:23). We recall that all priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests.

... *he did not eat bread...* while the people were grieved and motivated to action, Ezra was overcome with his own grief over *the transgression*. His fast from *bread* and *drink* seems to have been spontaneous, a result of the pain in his spirit.

When we think of mourning, it is usually in relation to death—the loss of a loved one or someone special. Ezra carried a sense of loss as he reflected on years his people wasted as they chased false gods and denied the Lord.

Verses 7 - 8... *they made a proclamation* ... likely refers to the chief priests and Levites to whom Ezra gave special charge to spread news of the Covenant. But it could mean that each person bore the responsibility to herald the agreed upon terms of their resolution. Remember that Ezra was appointed by the King and had tremendous power over all the governors, officials, and people of the land, pagan as well as Jews. His decision and words carried the might of the ruling nation.

... *they were to assemble at Jerusalem* ... only a small the territory was allocated to the returnees by the Persian court. Only Jerusalem and a small part of the territory of Judah before the exile made up post-exilic Judah. Therefore, it was possible for all the people to come to Jerusalem as Ezra commanded.

... *all his property would be forfeited* ... the severe consequences for not coming to Jerusalem also reveals the seriousness of the people’s resolution. Forfeiting one’s land and possessions and being cut off from *the congregation* would be the same treatment the foreign wives experienced. Those so penalized would have to find their homes elsewhere, away from God’s people.

Verse 9. ...*the men of Judah and Benjamin*... The vast majority of the returnees were from pre-exilic Judah, which was made up of:

1. the tribe of Simeon
2. the tribe of Benjamin
3. the tribe of Judah
4. most of the tribe of Levi (priests and Levites)



Note that though the northern tribes were taken into exile in 722 BC by Assyria, and most were assimilated into their exiled lands, many had since the time of Jeroboam and following, migrated to Judah because of the apostate religion instituted by Jeroboam. There would have been some of the northern tribe present.

... *twentieth day of the [ninth] month* ... corresponds to early December. Rain is normal at this time in the year. So, in addition to the spiritual *trembling*, there was also physical shivering in the cold, heavy rain.

This verse sounds like eye-witness details of this event. This is Ezra's journal

Verse 10. ... *Ezra the priest* ... sometimes Ezra is referred to as *the priest* (Ezra 10:16), sometimes he is referred to as "the scribe" (Nehemiah 8:1, 4, 13; 12:36) and sometimes by both of these terms, (Ezra 7:11, 21; Nehemiah 8:9; 12:26).

You have been unfaithful... an admission of guilt, confession is a necessary first step to repentance.

... *adding to the guilt of Israel* ... implies that the people had not learned the lesson of the exile. Instead of working to decrease sin, they were working for the opposite (2 Chronicles 28:13). So Ezra restated the charge.

Note, this was not the only sin of Israel, but it was a significant sin of God's people.

Verse 11. ... *Now therefore make confession...* shows the seriousness and mandatory nature of their confession.

Confession is the first response to conviction and a necessary step toward reconciliation with God,

(1 John 1:9). The next step is to follow through *and do His will*; that is, what He commanded in the first place.

Separation from *foreign wives* was not necessarily a judgment on any specific conduct on the wives' part, since no such conduct is listed. Instead, those wives were assumed to retain the priorities and religious practices of *the people of the land* among whom they had grown up. Only by severing their influence could the men of Judah and Benjamin be certain that the wives would not tempt them to idolatry.

It is troubling for many when they look at this decision for it not only involved these pagan wives who had not converted to Judaism, but also affected the children of these forbidden marriages. Some think **"That this was the excessive zeal in reforming, going beyond God's will and causing great harm. Yet we should say that this was in fact God's will"**.

This scholar and commentator helps us to understand the background to this decision:

"This was understood by the ancient culture – that of course, the woman would stay with their children. "All these women and their children "reflects the fact that in ancient societies,



as in ours, mothers were given custody of their children when marriage were dissolved”
(Yamauchi)

“It was also, no doubt, mitigated by support from the husbands.” Though by the Jewish laws such marriages were *null* and *void*, yet as the women they had taken did not know these laws, their case was deplorable. However, we may take it for granted that each of them received a portion according to the circumstances of their husbands, and that they and their children were not turned away desolate but had such a provision as their necessities required. *Humanity* must have dictated this, and no law of God is contrary to humanity. (Clarke).

Also we note this comment:

“Children may and sometimes do suffer, at least temporal evils, for their parent’s sins, or upon occasion of them, is most evident, both by the Scripture instances, and by the laws and usages of nations in some cases”. (Poole).

We know for example that when Abraham had to separate from Ishmael eventually, he made provision for them.

The term ‘confession’ also means “to give praise to.” Confession was an act of religious worship (Josh. 7:19; Neh. 12:27,31,38,40).

Note, sin often leads to choosing the lesser of bad choices, rather than choosing the better of good choices.

Verse 12. ..., *so must we do*. Concluding this part of the text is the *loud voice* of a unified people who experienced conviction of sin. Ezra’s leadership helped foster that commitment. Any spiritual leader worth following will always direct people to God and His glory.

CONCLUSION

As so much in the Bible today’s Text is another reminder of God’s faithfulness and providential care of His people. This is a reminder that God’s laws are put in place for our good and His glory and violations inevitably lead to unpleasant consequences.

Like the ancient Jews, we too are tempted by the culture that surrounds us, including the temptation to marry unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14–18).

The statement followed in the section verses 18 through 44 which is a list of those found guilty among the priests of taking pagan wives. This was a long list and in verse 44 it speaks of all these that taken pagan wives. It certainly indicates that these wives remained pagan and refused to join the covenant community. We saw this before for we know that Jezebel had no intention of joining the covenant community though she was married to Ahab but remained steadfast in her idolatrous practices.



So these pagan wives had to break their relationship with the people of Israel for they had another faith. The faith of the people of Israel was grounded in faith in the Lord God, not in race.

God's mercy provided hope for Israel to be restored to a right relationship with Him. But that required someone who would take the lead! Not everyone is gifted in the same way in this regard and different leaders may respond differently to the same problem. (It's rather humorous to contrast Ezra's leadership style in Ezra 9:3 with that of Nehemiah in Nehemiah 13:25.) Note, it all begins with having a burden of the heart and soul.

God's forgiving grace is available to us because of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The church is His bride (2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 19:7–9; 21:2, 9; 22:17). May we be faithful to our bridegroom!

REVIVAL! DO YOU WANT ONE?

So if you want a revival because you think that there is a need for revival you have been shown the steps. This is serious business. It is no laughing matter.

The book of Ezra shows us that we needed courage to start over or to try again.

We need a tomb in for our sins so that God with the was the purity that we need as God's people. Now

You must confess your sins.

You must come to some understanding of your error.

You must be prepared to pray, confess, weep, and throw yourself down in humiliation before God.

But first you must make a covenant before God according to the Law. This involves a solemn oath for the Covenant contains blessing for keeping the Covenant and curses for disobeying it. Then you will do what is required for you to remain in the Covenant.

