

Ezra 8-10

Good evening and thank you for joining us. Would you please turn in your bibles to Ezra 8? Well tonight we're going to finish this incredible book and next week we'll begin our study in the book of Philippians.

Last week we saw the scene shift as Zerubbabel, who led the first exodus from Babylon back to Jerusalem, he's moved off the scene, and Ezra is now leading another group back to Jerusalem. And we saw the character of this godly man. And if you recall we mentioned how this is critical because of the trial that Ezra is about to face.

The title of tonight's message is GOOD COURAGE

Let's pray

1 These are the heads of their fathers' houses, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of King Artaxerxes: In verses 2-14 Ezra lists the families that came with him from Babylon. You can read them on your own time, but let's skip to verse 15

15 Now I gathered them by the river that flows to Ahava, and we camped there three days. And I looked among the people and the priests, and found none of the sons of Levi there. This was a problem – how do you worship in the Temple with no servants for the Temple? According to the Law only the Levites could serve in the temple.

16-20

16 Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, leaders; also for Joiarib and Elnathan, men of understanding. 17 And I gave them a command for Iddo the chief man at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say to Iddo and his brethren^[fn] the Nethinim at the place Casiphia—that they should bring us servants for the house of our God. 18 Then, by the good hand of our God upon us, they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi, the son of Israel, namely Sherebiah, with his sons and brothers, eighteen men; 19 and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brothers and their sons, twenty men; 20 also of the Nethinim, whom David and the leaders had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinim. All of them were designated by name. Ezra sends recruiters to Casiphia – a Levite settlement - and they come back with 38 Levites, and 220 servants

There is an old Jewish rabbinical story that claims that back when Nebuchadnezzar brought Levites to Babylon he demanded they entertain him by playing and singing songs of the Jewish nation. They refused and bit off their fingertips so they couldn't play for their captors. Interesting story

21-23

21 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. 22 For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God is upon all

those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him.” 23 So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer. Ezra’s delegation was traveling with a lot of money, and he was worried about being a target. Robbers roamed the roads from Persia to Judah.

Ezra realizes the risk, and he debates on asking the king for a police escort. But Ezra already told the king that God would protect them. He didn’t want to undermine his witness. You ever done this-declared God’s faithfulness, then be like-um wait maybe I shoulda taken the help?

Now Ezra feels stuck, and doesn’t know what to do. So he does what we all should do when we really don’t know what to do...He humbled himself and sought God.

They camped by the Ahava to fast, and pray, and seek God for direction. This is an example for us-when was the last time you stopped – took a break from the hustle and bustle of life, and camped out just to communicate with God?

Notice, how verse 23 ends. 23 So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer. God provided Ezra with a plan.

24-27

24 And I separated twelve of the leaders of the priests— Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them— 25 and weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the articles, the

offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes, and all Israel who were present, had offered. 26 I weighed into their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, silver articles weighing one hundred talents, one hundred talents of gold, 27 twenty gold basins worth a thousand drachmas, and two vessels of fine polished bronze, precious as gold. What a smart strategy from God. They divided up the money and treasure so that if one of them gets ripped off, they will still have all the others who have it. Notice God's plan was practical!

28-31

28 And I said to them, "You are holy to the LORD; the articles are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD God of your fathers. 29 Watch and keep them until you weigh them before the leaders of the priests and the Levites and heads of the fathers' houses of Israel in Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD." 30 So the priests and the Levites received the silver and the gold and the articles by weight, to bring them to Jerusalem to the house of our God.

31 Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. And the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road. No other details provided-but I'd sure love to hear them!

32-39

32 So we came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days.

33 Now on the fourth day the silver and the gold and the articles were weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui, 34 with the number and weight of everything. All the weight was written down at that time.

35 The children of those who had been carried away captive, who had come from the captivity, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and twelve male goats as a sin offering. All this was a burnt offering to the LORD.

36 And they delivered the king's orders to the king's satraps and the governors in the region beyond the River. So they gave support to the people and the house of God. The exiles trip had taken four months, and it covered about 900 miles. God kept them safe on their dangerous trip, and all their 28 tons of valuable cargo arrived safely.

it's the spiritual mountain top-they are on fire for the Lord!!

Chapter 9

Ezra doesn't have time to get his bags unpacked before there's a problem

1-2

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 leaders were supposed to be examples – instead they were the chief perpetrators.

3-4

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. 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. This was a serious offense. It grieved Ezra. He not only rips his clothes – an oriental sign for angst and anguish – but he plucks hair from his head and beard.

Its important to understand what’s taking place here. These are the Jews who previously returned. Remember these were the people who had seen their city leveled, their Temple burned, their babies carried off into exile because of the sin of idolatry. And what launched them into that idolatry? You could trace it all the way back to the sin of Solomon.

King Solomon married foreign women – some 700 wives and 300 concubines. Solomon found that the marriage altar led to the altars of idolatry. When he embraced these pagan wives they brought their pagan gods into the marriage – and it eventually caused Solomon to compromise his loyalty to the true God.

This is what blew Ezra away – is history about to repeat itself? He can’t believe the Jews are making the same mistake all over

again, the same sin that caused them to receive God's judgment. Ezra is stunned that the people would even be flirting with the possibility. You'd think after what had happened marrying unbelievers would be the last sin they would be tempted to commit. How can this be?

Notice verse 1 tells us, the people of Israel did "not separate themselves." Hey, as followers of Jesus, we are called to live lives separate from the world. This is a vital principle, but it's one that's sometimes misunderstood.

In the Middle Ages monks literally went into the mountains and deserts to separate themselves from the world – logistical separation.

But God's desire for us is heart separation. Jesus wants us to live in the world - logistically. The separation God expects from us is to reserve our heart – and our mind – and soul - and our strength for Him. We're not to allow the attractions of this world to crowd out Jesus.

The issue for Ezra wasn't interracial marriage. Look at Jesus' genealogy and you'll find Gentiles. Rahab and Ruth both became part of Messiah's lineage.

The concern expressed in verse 2, "the holy seed is intermingled with the peoples of those lands" should be viewed in light of verse 1, "(Israel has) not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites..."

God wanted a spiritual separation. He still does. 1 John 4 4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. 6 We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Its interesting Ezra's severe grieving is over a sin he didn't commit. Yet, as we're about to read his incredible prayer, it's in the first person. It shows how strong Ezra identified with the Jewish people. This is always a mark of a good leader.

5-15

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. 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. 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!" And that's where Ezra's prayer ends – without offering a whole lot of hope for forgiveness. I'm sure Ezra wanted God to forgive the people – give them another chance.

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. Ezra is devastated. And as he's praying, the people join Ezra in the Temple.

Suddenly, in the midst of Ezra's grief a man named Shechaniah steps up and speaks to Ezra. His words are some of the most beautiful in the Bible

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. It's hard to find a more merciful and gracious statement than this. Israel is not just guilty of sin – but repetitive sin - the same sin again and again.

There's a brokenness over this sin. And it's a mark that the HS was convicting them of the sin-God was moving in their hearts!

But of course with real repentance it's not just the acknowledgment of sin, it's also the action to avoid the sin...

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. Shechaniah suggests that everyone who has married a pagan put away their wives and children. This was not separation, this was divorce.

4 Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it." This is my ministry verse...

Story

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. This was mandatory.

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. An interesting detail about the rain-you can picture the atmosphere. The willingness of people to forsake normal comforts and to humbly assemble in adverse circumstances was evidence they desired repentance.

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.” 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 3 months to conduct the interviews. As they spoke to each family the wife was given the opportunity to renounce her idols and former beliefs and commit her allegiance to the God of Israel.

Only those wives who refused to repent of their sin and idolatry were actually divorced from their husbands and expelled from the covenant community.

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,[fn] 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.

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 Elasah.

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, Jeziah, 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;[fn] 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,[fn] 36 Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, 37 Mattaniah, Mattenai, Jaasai,[fn] 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,^[fn] Joel, and Benaiah.

44 All these had taken pagan wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children. Hey, you don't overcome serious sin without getting serious about sin. Tonight, if you're struggling with a sin, even a repetitive sin, there is hope for you in Christ... confess, repent, and take action to eliminate it from your life