

REBUILDING BROKEN PLACES
STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF EZRA, NEHEMIAH, AND HAGGAI
EZRA CHAPTERS 9 & 10
“HOW COULD YOU DO THAT AFTER ALL THE LORD HAS DONE FOR YOU?”

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever been so disappointed in hearing about someone’s behavior that all you could do was sit down and grieve? How is it that people, who know that the Lord has been gracious to them, will still break His heart at their next opportunity by their sin? How should we respond to hearing such news? How can we encourage others (and ourselves) to repent while we still have time?

BACKGROUND: Some of the Israelites had returned from their captivity in Babylon when the Persian kings gave them permission. Technically, they were still “slaves” of the Persians but were free to rebuild their lives in Israel. Around 536 BC, Zerubbabel led nearly 50,000 Jews back to Israel. Ezra led about 5000 more back in 458 BC. Nehemiah came to lead the rebuilding of the walls in 444 BC. People from all 12 tribes returned, and the Israelites never struggled with idolatry after their captivity. However, many still did not submit to the Living God. Chapters 9&10 record events that occurred after Ezra had been in the land for four months.

I. “BAD COMPANY CAN CORRUPT GOOD MANNERS.” CHOOSE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WISELY AND BIBLICALLY. (Ezra 9:1-4) (1st Corinthians 15:33)

- A. After all the blessings God had bestowed upon the Israelites, many of them chose to disobey Him and marry women from the very ethnic groups in Canaan God commanded them not to marry. The reasons for the prohibition in the first place were because of the idolatrous practices of those people, and the danger of compromising true faith to please a spouse. *Believers are prohibited from intentionally marrying unbelievers. “Race” and “skin color” have nothing to do with who we should marry. (Deuteronomy 7:1-8)*
- B. Ezra showed the signs of deep grief and shock (tearing clothes, pulling out hair, etc.) at these deliberate acts of rebellion against God. **ARE WE AT ALL DEEPLY GRIEVED BY WHAT PEOPLE WHO CLAIM TO BE CHRISTIANS ARE DOING IN THIS COUNTRY?** Those who really know the Lord will “tremble” at His Word, meaning we show deep respect and honor to whatever God says, and we should recognize one another. (Ezra 9:3-4) (Isaiah 66:1-2)

II. GODLY PEOPLE PRAY FOR OTHERS WHO DO NOT HAVE THE SPIRITUAL LIFE TO PRAY FOR THEMSELVES. WE CANNOT MAKE OTHERS REPENT, BUT WE CAN CONFESS OUR CORPORATE SINS BECAUSE WE ARE IMPACTED BY THE BEHAVIOR OF OTHERS. (Ezra 9:5-15)

- A. Ezra expressed deep shame and humiliation before the Lord because of the sins of his fellow countrymen. He had not committed those same sins, but he identified himself with those sinners. We are identified with Adam and Eve in our sin, and we identify with Christ in our salvation. We win and lose as a team, so our actions impact others. We pray for America because we live here, but we are actually citizens of heaven! (Ezra 9:5-6) (Philippians 3:20-21)
- B. We should all admit that we have sinned greatly in the past, yet we have been given grace (favor) for a small window of time to use our freedom from sin to serve our Lord. God has not given up on us, but opportunities are limited. (Ezra 9:6-9)
- C. When the Holy Spirit makes us aware of our sins, we need to admit, confess, and repent. We should never pretend like decisions made by our political leaders are right just because we voted for them. The people were not admitting they had sinned against the Lord, but Ezra was not afraid to call out their sins. If we do not call out sins, we are showing we agree with those actions.

D. Only believers understand we have been punished less than our sins deserve. Job's friends self-righteously said he deserved more punishment without knowing what or if he had done anything specifically wrong! (Job 11:1-6) The truth is that all sin is worthy of death and damnation. We cannot stand before the Lord in our own righteousness, but we do stand in His Presence covered by the righteousness of Christ Jesus! (Ezra 9:10-15) (Psalm 130:3-4) (Isaiah 61:10) (2nd Corinthians 5:21)

III. THERE IS HOPE FOR A PREFERRED FUTURE WHEN STEPS OF REPENTANCE ARE TAKEN AND HARD DECISIONS ARE MADE. (Ezra 10:1-44)

A. Ezra's demonstration of repentance was used by God to cause those who needed to confess and repent to actually do so! You never know who the Holy Spirit might convict to follow the Lord if people actually see your obedience! (Ezra 10:1-4)

B. Sometimes good leaders have to move people to action by making sure they understand the consequences of not responding in time. The Lord does not give us forever to do what He has already instructed! Other leaders became involved in the solution while Ezra continued to fast and pray. They spent three months investigating the sinful relationships, and the Israelites had three days to respond or lose their property! (Ezra 10:5-16)

C. The Israelites were commanded to separate from their wives because they had broken faith by marrying them. (Deuteronomy 7:1-8) *We are not allowed to use the same criteria today to dissolve a marital commitment.* This instruction was specific to Israel in that setting, not the Church and society today. Those relationships were not legitimate marriages in the sight of God, and spiritually dangerous for those who would continue in them. Believers are instructed not to marry unbelievers, but you can not divorce your unsaved spouse if they want to stay with you. (1st Corinthians 7)

D. God honors the institution of marriage and promises His judgment on adulterers and fornicators. (Hebrews 13:4) He hates divorce (Malachi 2) because it hurts those involved, destabilizes families and society, and distorts the image of Christ being permanently married to us as the "Bride of Christ." Divorce was only allowed because human beings are so hard hearted that God made a way for the innocent party to have another chance at enjoying a relationship. (Matthew 19:1-10) (Deuteronomy 22)

E. It was an inconvenience for the people to come for the public ceremony of dissolving their marriages, as it was the rainy season and there were too many families impacted. *Doing God's will may inconvenience you, but it must be done to move from judgment to forgiveness.* As in this passage, there will always be some who do not want to change, (Ezra 10: 15) but we must not allow them stop us from doing God's will.

F. The investigation revealed over 100 offenders, including 27 priests, Levites, gatekeepers, and a temple singer. It is regretful when leaders set bad examples for us! Take note of the obscure names listed, and let that serve as a reminder that the Lord knows every individual and keeps records of every action we take. Make sure your sins have been forgiven before it is too late! (Ezra 10:18-44)

PRAY FOR OTHERS WHO ARE "MARRIED" TO THEIR SINFUL LIFESTYLES RATHER THAN TO THE LORD JESUS. IF YOUR HEART IS NEVER BROKEN OVER THE WAY PEOPLE DESPISE THE GRACE OF GOD, THEN PRAY UNTIL GOD BREAKS YOUR HEART TO BE LIKE HIS. ANY ONE OF US COULD BE THE PERSON GOD USES TO HELP OTHERS REPENT AND EXPERIENCE FREEDOM IN CHRIST.

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