

Ezra Nehemiah Lesson 4 Lecture

Ezra 9 – 10

- Scholars have puzzled over Ezra 9:1, which begins with “After these things had been done...”
 - Ezra arrived on the first of the 5th month (Ezra 8:33), but the assembly of the people before Ezra did not take place until the 20th day of the 9th month (Ezra 10:9).
 - This is a period of over 4 ½ months.
 - Why is the sin of intermarriage being mentioned to Ezra after 4 ½ months?
 - Scholars have proposed the following theories:
 - Ezra used the period to travel to all of the governors, sub-governors, and treasurers of the Trans-Euphrates to deliver the king’s orders regarding providing silver, wheat, wine, oil, and salt for the Temple as well as the prohibition against the imposition of taxes on the priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers, Temple servants, and other workers in the Temple.
 - The 2nd theory is that the events of Nehemiah 8:1-18 happened during this interval. These events record Ezra reading the Book of the Law of Moses to the assembled people.
 - A 3rd possibility is that the leaders of the exiles were hesitant to let Ezra know the extent of the problem.
 - The “leaders” here is an obscure expression. It likely refers to clan leaders, priests, and Levites. Whether these were leaders from the exiles who came with Ezra or leaders who were in the first group of exiles after the Edict of Cyrus, we cannot be sure.
 - The fact that priests, Levites, and clan leaders were all guilty of intermarriage with foreigners speaks to the sheer depth of the problem.

- Ezra's reaction to the news of the intermarriages with foreigners was not verbal at first. It was physical.
 - He tore his tunic and cloak.
 - He pulled out some of his hair and beard.
 - He sat down, appalled, until the time of the evening sacrifice.
 - All these actions have their parallels elsewhere in Scripture and are indicative of great grief. Examples include:
 - Jacob tearing his clothes when told Joseph had been killed;
 - David and his men tearing their clothes, mourning, weeping, and fasting after the deaths of Saul and his son Jonathan;
 - the prophet Elisha tearing his garment after he saw the prophet Elijah being taken up to heaven;
 - Job tearing his robe and shaving his head upon hearing that all his children were killed;

- Only after the physical reaction does Ezra's reaction become verbal. Falling on his hands and knees, Ezra offers a prayer with the following components:
 - A corporate confession of sin
 - God's just punishment for Israel's sins
 - God's favor on his people
 - God's influence on the Persian kings on behalf of the exiles
 - Another corporate confession of sin, with a reference to intermarriage with foreigners
 - Israel had been punished for its sins, but had not taken the punishment to heart.
 - A reference to the exiles as a remnant
 - A closing doxology to God, who is righteous; no man can stand in his presence.

- Ezra 9 is written in 1st person. Ezra 10 is written in 3rd person. Here is one of the other places where commentators see the hand of an editor, or even another author.
- Ezra 10:1 records that Ezra was “praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God.”
 - Ezra, therefore, was outside of the Temple.
 - He began to attract a large crowd of men, women, and children.
 - Moved by Ezra’s prayer, they also began to weep bitterly.
- Shekariah, a clan leader, is moved to make a corporate confession of sin on behalf of the assembled people. They have been “unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us.” (Ezra 10:2)
 - Not only does Shekariah make the corporate confession, but he also proposes a covenant that the guilty assembled there will send away their foreign wives.
 - In reality, this is a covenant renewal.
 - The marriages were illegal because they were contrary to God’s law.
 - Notice that not only are the foreign wives to be sent away, but all the children of these unions are to be sent away as well.
 - The term “sent away” here is the same expression used in Deuteronomy 24:3 to describe a divorce.
 - We might view this as harsh. However, there was no desire to separate the children from their mothers. Likewise, allowing the women and children to remain in the household would have continued the influence of the mothers over the children, particularly where foreign religious practices were concerned.

- Moving to Ezra 10:7, we see that the leaders who had been put under oath by Ezra in Ezra 10:5 now issue a message (the NIV uses proclamation) to all of Judah to assemble in 3 days, on penalty of forfeiting all their property and being expelled from the Jewish community.
 - The penalty had the force of law and was exactly the intent of Artaxerxes' letter to Ezra and the Trans-Euphrates, as noted in Ezra 7:26:
 - Whoever does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king must surely be punished by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment.
 - What exactly did expulsion from the Jewish community entail?
 - Spiritual exile
 - No participation in Temple services
 - No partaking of the daily and other sacrifices for the removal of their sins
 - Social exile
 - Totally cut off from other Jewish community members
 - No help in times of distress
 - Political exile
 - Possible forfeiture of citizenship in Judah
 - Effectively regarded as foreigners
- The resolution to investigating and dissolving the intermarriages was designed to be as fair as possible.
 - Ezra selected men who were clan heads to serve in a tribunal.
 - Each tribunal member was designated by name, meaning that his Jewish genealogy was documented. In effect, only those of pure Jewish origin were members of the tribunal. Obviously, men on the tribunal were not those guilty of intermarriage.
 - Those men who had married a foreign woman were to appear before the tribunal, along with the elders and judges of their hometown.

- The hometown elders and judges would presumably be more aware of the circumstances surrounding the intermarriages.
- The tribunal met for 75 days and documented 110 cases of intermarriage, for which the men needed to set aside their wives and children.
- To understand the extent of the intermarriage sin, one need look no further than the list of priests from Ezra 10: 18-22. There we find no less than 17 priests who had committed this sin.
 - As priests, they were expected to be mediators of the law.
 - Had these priests forgotten God's commands or were they hoping that their sin would never be discovered?
 - Furthermore, these priests made a guilt offering, which was for an unintentional sin by the priest, per Leviticus 5:15. Their sin clearly was intentional.
 - Ezra's presence, as a teacher of the law, now takes on a new dimension. He must instill in the priests a fuller understanding of the distinctions in God's law, so that further sins would be avoided.

Ezra Nehemiah Lesson 4

Ezra 9 - 10

Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place. Psalms 28:2

1. Read Ezra 9:1-4 and Deuteronomy 7:1-4.
 - a. From the Ezra passage, what did the leaders report to Ezra?

After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, “The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. ² They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness.” Ezra 9:1-2
 - b. What does the “detestable practices” of Ezra 9:1 mean? (Hint: see Deuteronomy 18:9-11, Ezekiel 23:36-39, and Ezekiel 44:7.)
 - When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. ¹⁰ **Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, ¹¹ or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. ¹² Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD; because of these same detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. Deuteronomy 18:9-12**
 - The LORD said to me: “Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then confront them with their detestable practices, ³⁷ **for they have committed adultery and blood is on their hands. They committed adultery with their idols; they even sacrificed their children, whom they bore to me, as food for them. ³⁸ They have also done this to me: At that same time they defiled my sanctuary and desecrated my Sabbaths. ³⁹ On the very day they sacrificed their children to their idols, they entered my sanctuary and desecrated it.** That is what they did in my house. Ezekiel 23:36-39
 - In addition to all your other detestable practices, **you brought foreigners uncircumcised in heart and flesh into my sanctuary, desecrating my temple while you offered me food, fat and blood, and you broke my covenant.** Ezekiel 44:7

- c. How does the Deuteronomy 7:1-4 passage add context?
- When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations —the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you— ² and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. ³ **Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, ⁴ for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods,** and the LORD’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. Deuteronomy 7:1-4
- d. Why would the issue reported by the leaders be a problem? (Hint: Read 1 Kings 11:1-6.)
- **King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women** besides Pharaoh’s daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. ² They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, “You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.” **Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. ³ He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. ⁴ As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. ⁵ He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. ⁶ So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.** 1 Kings 11:1-6
 - By not isolating themselves from the nations around them, the people could now be practicing idolatry.
 - Intermarrying with the foreigners around them would introduce foreign gods and idolatry into the Israelite families.
 - Ezra 9:2 says that the leaders and officials led the way in this unfaithfulness. That was a problem. The leaders, by their behavior, are setting a poor example and giving tacit approval to breaking God’s commandments.

- e. The Edit of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-4) was issued in 539 BC. Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the 7th year of King Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:8), which was 458 BC. How long could the issue reported to Ezra have been going on?

81 years

2. Read Ezra 9:3-5. What was Ezra's reaction to what he heard?

When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled. ⁴ Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered around me because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles. And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice. ⁵ Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the LORD my God ⁶ and prayed Ezra 9:3-6

3. Read Ezra 9:6-15.

- a. How does Ezra describe the people's sins?

- because **our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens.** ⁷ From the days of our ancestors until now, our guilt has been great. Ezra 9:6-7
- **For we have forsaken the commands ¹¹ you gave through your servants the prophets** when you said: 'The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruption of its peoples. By their detestable practices they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other. ¹² Therefore, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them at any time, that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it to your children as an everlasting inheritance.' Ezra 9:10-12

- b. What did the past sins lead to?

Because of our sins, we and our kings and our priests have been subjected to the sword and captivity, to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings, as it is today. Ezra 9:7

- c. What had God done for the people of Judah?

But now, for a brief moment, the LORD our God has been gracious in **leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in his sanctuary**, and so our God gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage. ⁹ Though we are slaves, our God has not forsaken us in our bondage. **He has shown us kindness in the sight of the kings of Persia: He has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins, and he has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem.** Ezra 9:8-9

- d. What does Ezra fear will be the result of the current sin?
Would you not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivor? Ezra 9:14

4. Read Ezra 10:1-4.

- a. As Ezra was praying, what did the people do?
While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites—men, women and children—gathered around him. They too wept bitterly. Ezra 10:1
- b. What was the declaration by one of the men?
Then Shekariah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra, “We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel. Ezra 10:2
- c. What covenant did he propose?
Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and of those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law. Ezra 10:3
- d. How do you think the non-Jewish neighbors would have reacted to this action?
- Anger
 - Disappointment
 - Frustration
 - Sadness

5. Read Ezra 10:5-6.

- a. What did Ezra do next?
So Ezra rose up and put the leading priests and Levites and all Israel under oath to do what had been suggested. Ezra 10:5
- b. What did the people do?
The priests, Levites, and all the people took the oath. Ezra 10:5
- c. What personal actions did Ezra take next and why?
Then Ezra **withdrew from before the house of God** and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While he was there, he **ate no food and drank no water, because he continued to mourn over the unfaithfulness of the exiles.** Ezra 10:6

6. Read Ezra 10: 7-17.

a. What proclamation was issued?

A proclamation was then issued throughout Judah and Jerusalem for all the exiles to assemble in Jerusalem. Ezra 10:7

b. What was the penalty for failing to appear?

Anyone who failed to appear within three days would forfeit all his property, in accordance with the decision of the officials and elders, and would himself be expelled from the assembly of the exiles. Ezra 10:8

c. What does exclusion from the community imply?

- They could not live among the other exiles.
- They could not participate in Jewish festivals and could not offer sacrifices at the Temple.
- They could not have the services of a priest.

d. When did the people gather?

Within the three days, all the men of Judah and Benjamin had gathered in Jerusalem. And on the twentieth day of the ninth month, all the people were sitting in the square before the house of God, greatly distressed by the occasion and because of the rain. Ezra 10:9

e. What did Ezra declare?

Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “You have been unfaithful; you have married foreign women, adding to Israel’s guilt. ¹¹ Now honor the LORD, the God of your ancestors, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives.” Ezra 10:10-11

f. What did the assembly declare in Ezra 10:12?

The whole assembly responded with a loud voice: “You are right! We must do as you say. Ezra 10:12

- g. What did the assembly propose as a way to deal with the sin?
But there are many people here and it is the rainy season; so we cannot stand outside. Besides, this matter cannot be taken care of in a day or two, because we have sinned greatly in this thing. ¹⁴ Let our officials act for the whole assembly. Then let everyone in our towns who has married a foreign woman come at a set time, along with the elders and judges of each town, until the fierce anger of our God in this matter is turned away from us.” Ezra 10:13-14
- h. Was there any opposition?
Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah, supported by Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite, opposed this. Ezra 10:15
- i. How long did it take to deal with the sin? (Hint: Ezra 10:9, 17)
About 3 ¼ months (From the 20th day of the 9th month to the 1st day of the 1st month)

7. Read Ezra 10:18-44.

- a. Which 3 people groups are named in this passage?
Priests, Levites, and Gatekeepers
- b. What is surprising about the first group?
The priests should have been knowledgeable about God’s prohibition against intermarriage with foreigners.
- c. What did the men from Ezra 10:18-19 do above what was covenanted?
They all gave their hands in pledge to put away their wives, and for their guilt they each presented a ram from the flock as a guilt offering. Ezra 10:19
- d. Read Leviticus 5:14-19, which discusses the guilt offering. Do you think a guilt offering was the appropriate offering here? Why or why not?
- If anyone sins and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD’s commands, even though they do not know it, they are guilty and will be held responsible. Leviticus 5:17
 - The guilt offering was meant for unintentional sins. The priests should have known about the sin committed by intermarrying with foreigners. This was hardly an unintentional sin.

- e. Does Numbers 15:30-31 change your opinion?
- But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or foreigner, blasphemes the LORD and must be cut off from the people of Israel. ³¹ Because they have despised the LORD's word and broken his commands, they must surely be cut off; their guilt remains on them. Numbers 15:30-31
- f. Do you think the men were fortunate in their punishment for their sin?
Yes, because the Numbers 15:30-31 passage states they should be cut off from the assembly of Israelites.
- g. Why do you think the punishment of Numbers 15 was not invoked?
- Ezra was giving the guilty the benefit of doubt that they were not aware of the sin they were committing.
 - The community of the exiles was small. They needed every man they had to rebuild Judah and to conduct Temple activities.
- h. What do you think happened to the men who opposed the covenant?
- They had to leave the community of the Israelites.

Ezra 9 - 10

Ezra 9:1

- Scholars Have Puzzled Over This Verse
- Ezra Arrived On the 1st of the 5th Month (Ezra 8:33), But the Assembly of the People Did Not Occur Until the 20th Day of the 9th Month (Ezra 10:9)
- A Period of Over 4 ½ Months
- Why Is the Sin of Intermarriage Being Mentioned to Ezra After 4 ½ Months?

Ezra 9:1 Theories

- Ezra Used the Period to Travel to All of the Governors, Sub-governors, and Treasurers of the Trans-Euphrates Regarding the King's Orders
- The Events of Nehemiah 8:1-18 Happened During This Interval (Reading of the Book of the Law of Moses to the People)
- The Leaders Were Hesitant to Let Ezra Know the Extent of the Problem
 - The “Leaders” Is an Obscure Expression; Likely Clan Leaders, Priests, and Levites
 - The Fact That Priests, Levites, and Clan Leaders Were All Guilty of Intermarriage With Foreigners Speaks to the Depth of the Problem

Ezra's Reaction

- Initially Physical, Not Verbal
 - Tore His Tunic and Cloak
 - Pulled Out Some of His Hair and Beard
 - Sat Down, Appalled, Until the Time of the Evening Sacrifice
- Parallels in Scripture are Indicative of Great Grief
 - Jacob; David; Elisha; Job

Ezra's Prayer

- A Corporate Confession of Sin
- God's Just Punishment for Israel's Sins
- God's Favor on His People
- God's Influence on the Persian Kings on Behalf of the Exiles
- Another Corporate Confession of Sin, With a Reference to Intermarriage With Foreigners
- Israel Had Not Taken Previous Punishment to Heart
- A Reference to the Exiles as a Remnant
- A Closing Doxology to God, Who is Righteous; No Man Can Stand in His Presence

Ezra 10

- Ezra 9 is Written in 1st Person; Ezra 10 is Written in 3rd Person; Another Place Where the Hand of an Editor or Another Author Can Be Seen
- Ezra 10:1: Ezra Was “Praying and Confessing, Weeping and Throwing Himself Down Before the House of God”
 - Ezra Was Outside of the Temple
 - He Had Attracted a Large Crowd of Men, Women, and Children
 - Moved by Ezra’s Prayer, They Began to Weep Bitterly

Shekaniah's Confession

- Shekaniah, a Clan Leader, Makes a Corporate Confession of Sin on Behalf of the Assembled People
- Ezra 10:2: They Have Been “Unfaithful to Our God”
- He Proposes a Covenant That the Guilty Will Send Away Their Foreign Wives; In Reality, This is a Covenant Renewal
- The Marriages Were Illegal Because They Were Contrary to God's Law
- The Children of These Union Will Be Sent Away as Well
- “Sent Away” is the Same Expression Used in Deuteronomy 24:3 to Describe a Divorce
- No Desire to Separate the Children From Their Mothers But Continued Foreign Religious Influence Over Them Must End

Ezra 10:7

- A Message/Proclamation: All of Judah Must Assemble in 3 Days, On Penalty of Forfeiting All Their Property and Being Expelled From the Jewish Community
- The Penalty Had the Force of Law
- This Was Exactly the Intent of Artaxerxes' Letter to Ezra and the Trans-Euphrates in Ezra 7:26:
 - “Whoever Does Not Obey the Law of Your God and the Law of the King Must Surely Be Punished by Death, Banishment, Confiscation of Property, or Imprisonment”

Expulsion From the Community

- Spiritual Exile
 - No Participation in Temple Services
 - No Partaking of the Daily and Other Sacrifices for the Removal of Their Sins
- Social Exile
 - Totally Cut Off From Other Jewish Community Members
 - No Help in Times of Distress
- Political Exile
 - Possible Forfeiture of Citizenship in Judah
 - Effectively Regarded as Foreigners

Resolving the Intermarriage Sin

- The Resolution Was Designed to Be as Fair as Possible
- Ezra Selected Men Who Were Clan Heads to Serve in a Tribunal
- Each Tribunal member Was Designated by Name, Meaning His Jewish Genealogy Was Documented
- Men on the Tribunal Were Not Guilty of Intermarriage
- Those Men Who Had Intermarried Were to Appear Before the Tribunal, Along with the Elders and Judges of Their Hometown, Who Would Be More Aware of the Circumstances of the Intermarriages
- Over 75 Days, 110 Cases of Intermarriage Were Documented

The Extent of the Sin

- 17 Priests are Named in Ezra 10:18-22
- Priests Were Expected to Be Mediators of the Law
- Had the Priests Forgotten God's Commands or Were They Hoping Their Sin Would Never Be Discovered?
- The Priests Made a Guilt Offering, Which Was For an Unintentional Sin (Leviticus 5:15); Their Sin Was Clearly Intentional
- Ezra's Presence, as a Teacher of the Law, Now Takes on a New Dimension
- He Must Instill in the Priests a Fuller Understanding of the Distinctions in God's Law, to Avoid Further Sins