

## 6—Ezra 9-10—Hope Remains Through Repentance

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### I. Introduction

- A. We've seen a lot of opposition in the first 8 chapters of Ezra. God has sovereignly cared for his people against many threats. However, the threats are not always on the outside.
  - 1. Do you recall in Numbers when Balak asked the prophet Balaam to curse Israel for him?
  - 2. If you know the story, Balaam could not speak a curse against God's people but blessed them.
  - 3. But do you know how Balak figured out how to potentially bring Israel down?
  - 4. In Numbers 31 it says that Balaam gave advice to Balak to send women to entice the men of Israel. In Numbers 25 it says—the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked itself to Baal of Peor. The anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.
    - a) When the dust settled, some 24,000 people had died from the plague God sent.
    - b) The sin of some led to the death of many. That opposition was from within the people of God.
- B. In a similar way, news broke last week news that a very well-known pastor who is 73 years old was found to be in an adulterous relationship with a girl in her twenties. He has been removed as pastor but many will be hurt or maybe even walk away from the faith because of this which is similar to the sin I just mentioned from Numbers.
- C. I suppose some will hear this and think—this pastor is okay, right?
  - 1. In Matthew 18 Jesus lays out the instructions for confronting sin.
  - 2. Each step is clear. One goes, then a few more go and finally the whole church is informed that the person would not repent.
    - a) This person was living in open and unrepentant sin like adultery and thought he or she could live like that and still profess to be a Christian.
    - b) That's not true. The final step Jesus gives is to remove the one who will not repent from the church and treat them like a tax-collector and sinner. In other words, like an unbeliever.
- D. If this pastor I mentioned does not repent, it will reveal that he does not know the God of the Bible and he will eternally perish. But if he does—as our text today makes absolutely clear—there remains hope even in this.

### II. Main Point

- A. In light of that, the main point is that God acts justly and righteously in accordance with his written word but he is gracious to expose their sin and show mercy if they repent.

### III. Outline

- A. The Unfaithfulness Exposed
- B. Ezra's Response to Unfaithfulness
- C. The Call to Repentance

### IV. Exposition

- A. We've anticipated a need the first remnant had as the Lord prepared and sovereignly arranged for Ezra and a new remnant to return to the land of promise. That need has gone unexposed for many years but now as is the pattern of God throughout the Bible is to send someone to remind them that God is sovereign and he will do what he says he will do according to his word. In the opening verse of chapter 9, the remnants' unfaithfulness is exposed.
  - 1. Before we explore this text, let me point out another theme and pattern of God—that is salvation through judgment. There's a really good book on this by Jim Hamilton which is called "Salvation Through Judgment" if you would like to read more about that.
    - a) In this scene and in many others, God exposes people's sin while they live so that they can respond in repentance.
      - (1) It's like owning a house that you have made a contract to pay such and such per month and then getting a notice in the mail that you have failed to keep your agreement and if this isn't taken care of they will foreclose on your house.
      - (2) God is graciously giving them an opportunity to be reminded of the covenant demands even though they ought to know it and obey it already.

- (3) If they respond in repentance, then they have rightly judged their sin and hope remains. If they fail to respond, then they will be judged later and will not receive salvation.
  - (a) Does that make sense?
    - i) If God has exposed your sin through his word and you respond through repentance and faith in Christ, God will save you.
      - (1) If you fail to heed the warning and go on living in unrepentant sin, judgment will come later.
2. With that in mind, let's see how God graciously gives the people an opportunity to respond in repentance to the promises they had made in their covenant with him.
  - a) There in verse one it begins by saying—After these things had been done.
    - (1) Last week we saw what Ezra had been authorized to do. The following response tells us that he seems to have appointed officials that knew God's law. About 5 months had gone by and here we are at verse one.
    - (2) It goes on to say there in verse one—the officials approached Ezra and said, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the land with their abominations."
      - (a) The list of nations is the same list in Exodus 34 and Deuteronomy 7 where the covenant was established and reestablished again.
        - i) Part of the covenant promises involved the promised land—an inheritance—where they have been restored to.
        - ii) As they were to enter the land, they were supposed to drive out its inhabitants so that they would not worship other gods for the LORD is a jealous God.
          - (1) That would break the first commandment of the covenant and would make void the promise of the land.
      - (b) The issue with not separating and not marrying the peoples of the land was directly related to people doing what I pointed out from Numbers in the introduction but also do you recall why the Kingdom was divided?
        - i) In 1 Kings 11 we hear what King Solomon did in violation of the covenant—Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh.
          - (1) Moses goes on to say in the next verse—You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.
          - (2) What did the sovereign Lord do when Solomon did this? In 1 Kings 11:9 it says—And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the LORD commanded.
          - (3) So, God tore the Kingdom from Solomon.
  - (3) When you hear the news there in the first 2 verses it's devastating.
    - (a) Notice there in middle of verse 2 the primary offenders were the leaders. "And in this unfaithfulness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost."
      - i) This unfaithfulness is not a racial issue. When you hear it say there in verse 2—For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands—the problem is theological not racial.
        - (1) If it were merely about race then those people of the land back in Ezra chapter 6 verse 21 could not have joined them in worship of the Passover.
        - (2) Nor should the book of Ruth even be considered as part of the Bible. She was not a Jew but rather a Moabite who said—(Ruth 1:16-17) <sup>16</sup> But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your

God my God. <sup>17</sup> Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.”

(a) When Ruth breaks with the gods of her people and commits to follow the LORD exclusively then marriage to Boaz was right and good.

(b) This issue was not racial but theological. Those here in Ezra married women like Solomon did that had not separated themselves from the abominations of their gods.

3. So, the issue of unfaithfulness is that the people, the priests, and the Levites were married to people who worshipped other gods and turned their heart from the LORD.

a) Does the NT teach this same thing? Are we as followers of Christ expected to live this way?

(1) Yes! Paul instructs the church in (2 Corinthians 6:14-16) <sup>14</sup> Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? <sup>15</sup> What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup> What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God...

(2) I was taught that this meant that a white person was not to marry a black person.

i) I remember asking—is it okay for Chinese to marry Korean?

(b) That is false. That text has nothing to do with skin color.

(c) It means if you are a follower of Christ, you are not to marry someone who is not.

(d) There are more ways that we should not form partnerships but that is the main one.

B. In light of the news coming out that the remnant had been unfaithful to God—they had committed spiritual adultery with God—how will Ezra respond to this devastating news?

1. Ezra’s response was immediate—verse 3—As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled.

a) What does this image of Ezra communicate to us? If you saw someone in the street like this, what would be your first thought?

(1) I would think he had been beaten up by someone.

(2) And that’s it. This news of unfaithfulness has crushed his soul.

(3) His torn clothes are a visible sign of his broken heart.

(4) This is how a spouse would feel when adultery happens. Sin is awful and painful.

b) How do you respond to sin like this?

(1) The world would tell Ezra to stop it.

(a) You are putting off negative vibes.

(b) You’ve got to think positive.

(2) The world would tell Ezra to join in.

(a) There’s nothing wrong with this. God will forgive you in the end.

(b) He doesn’t care about who I marry and who I sleep with. Isn’t God busy overseeing the universe...you know...big important things?

(3) This has become so common in the church that no one is bothered by this.

(a) People claiming to be Christians live together unmarried.

(b) Sex outside of marriage is commonplace among those who claim to follow Christ.

c) Our response should be like Ezra.

(1) If it’s not, then that means we do not know God through his word and we somehow think it will go unnoticed on judgment day.

(2) We ought to be a people like those who saw Ezra’s response there in verse 4—Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel...gathered around Ezra while he sat appalled until the evening sacrifice.

(a) For some length of time, they sat thinking about the unfaithfulness of the returned exiles.

i) Many people attempt to not think about their sin by sinning in other ways.

(b) If you know of sins like this in the church, why are you not appalled and trembling at the words of God?

i) We are responsible for what we know. What will you do with that information?

- ii) The God who sovereignly orchestrated this whole event of Ezra-Nehemiah to accomplish his purposes will also do exactly what he says about those who live in unrepentant sin.
    - (1) Judgment now or judgment later?
    - (2) Please love the soul of those walking in sin. Your silence means you either think nothings wrong with what they are doing or they have turned you heart to follow their ways and not the Lord's.
    - (3) If I did what that 73 year old pastor did I mentioned in the introduction what would you do to me?
      - (a) I think you would ask me to resign but would you do the same to a member of this church...maybe even your own family?
      - (b) You should. Does it only matter for leaders? No
- d) Ezra's first impulse was a broken and contrite heart. His second impulse was to pray after he sat appalled thinking about what he had heard.
  - (1) Notice there in verse 6 how quickly he moves from "my" to "our."
    - (a) He says that—our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to heaven.
      - i) The sin of a member of the people of God was a sin of all the people of God.
      - ii) If when I was kid I stole my neighbor's lawnmower, do you think that would only hurt me?
      - iii) Would I not harm the name of my family?
      - iv) And furthermore, perhaps my dad finds out about it and congratulates me for doing it instead of punishing me?
      - v) What if my dad refused to make me take it back or pay for what I did wrong?
      - vi) What does that say about my family?
    - (b) The sin of a member of this church is a reflection of us all.
    - (c) But more than a family name, we carry the Name of Christ and therefore bring open shame upon him.
  - (2) Ezra praises the Lord in verses 8 and 9 for having shown the remnant steadfast love.
    - (a) God has been the faithful One but his people have not.
    - (b) He had shown them exceeding kindness to grant the remnant some reviving to set up the house of their God.
    - (c) He had protected them and provided for them like a perfect husband but his wife—the remnant—was unfaithful.
      - i) Can you imagine this?
  - (3) On what basis will God judge his people?
    - (a) Notice Ezra's prayer there in verse 10—O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments.
    - (b) God's judgment will be righteous.
    - (c) God's people are called to be holy set apart for him.
      - i) But the remnant became apart of the world by walking in the ways of the world.
      - ii) That's described throughout this text as impurity and abomination and uncleanness.
      - iii) It's also seen as seeking the peace or prosperity of the world there in verse 12.
      - iv) However, peace and prosperity come through our trust and obedience to the Lord through the word.
        - (1) According to verse 12, to trust the Lord resulted in strength, eating of the goodness of the land and leaving an inheritance forever.
        - (2) For those who continue to intentionally walk in their own ways and forsake the good ways of God they are giving up that which is good for that which is evil. They give up freedom for slavery. Eternal life for eternal death.
- 2. Ezra has heard the news of grievous unfaithfulness. He tore his clothes and hair. He sat appalled. He confessed the sins of the people of which he is apart of.

- a) As we move into chapter 10, the confession doesn't end, it continues.
  - b) By now he is weeping and casting himself down before the house of God.
  - c) He doesn't take this lightly.
  - d) I could easily unpack situations I've been in where this was very similar.
    - (1) The hurt it caused me personally was awful and it lingered on for days.
    - (2) But my concern and fear was for how the sinner would respond.
    - (3) Will they too be broken for how they had walked in unfaithfulness to the Lord?
- C. Chapter 9 opened with the officials responding to the unfaithfulness of the remnant by telling Ezra. Then we saw Ezra's response. And now we need to see the response of the remnant with a hope of repentance.
- 1. To fall into sin doesn't have to be the end of the story. Yes, God is just and righteous and will judge according to his word. But he is also merciful.
  - 2. Being exposed to the light was necessary but that's not enough.
  - 3. As Ezra cried out before the house of the Lord, there in chapter 10 verse 1 a very great assembly gathered to him out of Israel.
    - a) They too wept bitterly.
    - b) Now the people are taking this seriously.
  - 4. Among them, a man by the name of Shecaniah speaks up there in verse 2.
    - a) "We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land.
      - (1) End of the story? Not by a long shot!
      - (2) Notice what else he says—but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this.
        - (a) What hope do they have? Repentance is the only remedy.
        - (b) Here it is—Therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of Ezra and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the Law.
        - (c) As a dad, I normally reminded my kids how much I hate to discipline them.
          - i) I made it clear that it was NOT my choice to discipline but theirs.
          - ii) When they chose to break the rules they chose the consequences.
          - iii) As the dad, it was up to me to carry those consequences out.
          - iv) "Such pain would have been unnecessary had they kept their promises to obey the word rather than forsaking it." (P. House 517)
    - b) Shecaniah calls Ezra to action there in verse 4—Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it.
      - (1) Would you support the biblical practice of church discipline like this?
      - (2) What has happened to confession of sin and holding people accountable?
        - (a) Church membership is meant to be an affirmation to the watching world that we believe each of us are walking faithfully with the Lord.
        - (b) That doesn't mean perfect but repentant.
      - (3) Ezra's response to the call to action by making the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take an oath to do as had been said.
        - (a) It says there at the end of verse 5—So they took the oath.
    - c) After taking the oath, Ezra was responding by fasting because he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles.
      - (1) A proclamation was made to gather all the returned exiles to Jerusalem.
        - (a) Sin can be exposed.
        - (b) The wrong can be acknowledged.
        - (c) But repentance is more than that. It takes action not just say I'm sorry.
        - (d) Within Jesus' instructions on church discipline, the final call is to assemble the church to take action too. We must all take responsibility for this.
        - (e) There in verse 8 the consequences for not showing up were given.

- i) If anyone did not come within three days, by order of the officials and the elders all his property should be forfeited, and he himself banned from the congregation of the exiles.
          - (1) We're going to try this for members' meetings.
        - ii) Do you think unrepentant sin is serious?
        - iii) Yea! It has brought guilt on all of Israel.
        - iv) Will God send another army to destroy the temple again and haul them off into exile again?
        - v) Is that not what they deserve? They have broken the covenant!
  - d) Well, all the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled within three days.
    - (1) What will happen?
    - (2) They are told to make confession to God and separate themselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.
      - (a) The action to be taken in repentance was for them to put away the foreign wives and children. It wasn't a simple, I'm sorry and let's move on.
      - (b) Is this harsh? Does sin just harm you?
      - (c) If you are a careful reader of the Bible you might say that the NT prohibits this kind of response in 1 Corinthians 7.
        - i) However, if you notice there it is describing someone who comes to faith in Christ while married.
        - ii) Paul instructs the believer to remain in the marriage if his or her spouse consents to live with them.
  - e) All the people acknowledge the weightiness of the matter as they sat in the open square before the house of God, trembling because of the matter and because of the heavy rain.
    - (1) The assembly asked for the elders and judges of every city to investigate each case.
    - (2) Ezra appoints those to undertake this task.
    - (3) They began on the first day of the tenth month and by the first day of the first month they came to end of all the men who had married foreign women.
    - (4) Therefore, all that were found from among the priests, Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and all of Israel pledged to put away their wives and bring forth a guilt offering for their guilt.
5. Verses 18-44 list the names of those people.
- a) Better to have your name published among the repentant than not.
  - b) Ezra ends rather abruptly.
  - c) What else is there to say?
  - d) This is a time of mourning. Lots of lives have been hurt greatly because of their sin.
  - e) Sin is so serious that the only way to fix it was the death of the Son of God. The cross tells you just how awful it is and to what lengths God went to be just and merciful.
  - f) Your only remedy is repentance and faith.
    - (1) If you will turn away from your sin and turn to Christ you will be forgiven.
    - (2) But if you turn back to sin and refuse to repent, eternal judgment will come.
    - (3) But for those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of Life like these in Ezra, will be forever with him in eternal life.