

Ezra 9-10 • Personal & Corporate Responsibility

Introduction

[If possible, read through Ezra 9-10:14 before beginning the study.]

It seems that in all the commotion to return to Israel that the people were focused more on accomplishing the call of God to rebuild the temple than the call of God to rebuild themselves. Temporarily lost in their zeal to mobilize themselves and their resources was the fact that they had not been living according to **ALL** of God's Word.

It's important to note that Ezra was a scribe, not a prophet. He was not someone of great spiritual stature such as Moses or Samuel or Daniel. We never hear prophetic utterances or visions come from Ezra because he is obedient to the Word God has already given. There are 5 times in Ezra that state "the hand of God" was with him. There was no need for "the mouth of God" to be with Ezra since God had already spoken through His Word and Ezra therefore clearly knew what God expected of Him. Therefore his obedience revealed "the hand of God" that supported Ezra as a result of obedience to God's already

¹Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. ²For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness."

³When I heard about this matter, I tore my garment and my robe, and pulled some of the hair from my head and my beard, and sat down appalled. ⁴Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel on account of the unfaithfulness of the exiles gathered to me, and I sat appalled until the evening offering.

[Read v.1-4]

Q: What had those under Zerubbabel's and Joshua's leadership failed to do?

A: Keep themselves separated from the indigenous people of the land.

Q: What did the people groups listed in v.1 all have in common?

A: They were completely devoted to false gods, false worship, and quite adept at enticing others into their false religions.

Q: Are we talking about a few people, or just a small segment of society that failed to separate themselves?

A: Everyone. It crossed all societal lines and included both the civil and spiritual leadership. (Priests, Levites, princes and rulers as well as the people.)

Q: Note that Israel is described in v.2 as "the holy race". Is the issue just about racial segregation?

A: It's really about being "set apart" unto God. The word "holy" here is the same word used of God, as in "Holy God". Combined with these people's idolatrous background, this is a very serious spiritual issue, not something that can be perverted into "keeping the races pure." It's about being pure from sin.

Q: What major point does this highlight in the difference between the people of the 1st return and these of the 2nd?

A: The 1st was focused on re-establishing the temple and its sacrifices. They're like new converts who have received forgiveness but have not done anything more to change their life. The 2nd was focused on establishing God's law. They represent converts that now must go to the next plateau of salvation by changing the consistency of their daily walk through obedience to **ALL** of God's Word.

⁵But at the evening offering I arose from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn, and I fell on my knees and stretched out my hands to the LORD my God; ⁶and I said, “O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens. ⁷Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt, and on account of our iniquities we, our kings and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity and to plunder and to open shame, as it is this day.

⁸But now for a brief moment grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage. ⁹For we are slaves; yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended lovingkindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us reviving to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem.

[Read v.5-7]

Q: What is Ezra’s first acknowledgment in v.6?

A: Personal acknowledgment. He includes himself in stating “our iniquities”. He makes no distinction between himself and his fellow kin that have actually committed the sin.

Q: Ezra’s next acknowledgment in v.7 is for all of Israel. Why should it include everyone whether it be the first remnant, the most recent remnant, or those still remaining in Babylon – if not everyone actually committed the sin?

A: We **ARE** our brother’s keeper and are responsible for holding them accountable. What was everyone thinking as they attended all these weddings, made all these marital arrangements, engaged in long-term contracts? The “innocent” allowed the “guilty” to plant and reap sin and therefore the whole of Israel is guilty.

[Read v.8-9]

FYI: This is the first documented instance of the word “grace” being used in the Bible as opposed to “lovingkindness.”

Q: What is one of the primary purposes of God’s grace according to v.8?

A: To provide the opportunity to recognize sin and take action against it before it’s too late.

Q: Compare v. 9 with 10:11, the ultimate solution to this situation.

- Three things in 9:9 – “raise up the house of our God”, “restore its ruins”, “give us a wall”.
- Three things in 10:11 – “make confession”, “do His will”, “separate yourselves”.
- The grace of God in raising His house again is providing the opportunity to make confession and be personally reconciled to Him again.
- The grace of God in restoring the temple from ruins is to build on His foundation – to do His will – becoming daily obedient to Him.

The grace of God in giving a wall is to provide the opportunity to separate ourselves unto Him exclusively.

¹⁰“Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, ¹¹which You have 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 end to end and with their impurity. ¹²So now do not give your daughters to their sons nor take their daughters to your sons, and never seek their peace or their prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it as an inheritance to your sons forever.’ ¹³After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and our great guilt, since You our God have requited us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us an escaped remnant as this, ¹⁴shall we again break Your commandments and intermarry with the peoples who commit these abominations? Would You not be angry with us to the point of destruction, until there is no remnant nor any who escape?”

¹⁵“O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we have been left an escaped remnant, as it is this day; behold, we are before You in our guilt, for no one can stand before You because of this.”

⁷They made a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the exiles, that they should assemble at Jerusalem, ⁸and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the leaders and the elders, all his possessions should be forfeited and he himself excluded from the assembly of the exiles.

⁹So all the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days. It was the ninth month on the twentieth of the month, and all the people sat in the open square before the house of God, trembling because of this matter and the heavy rain.

¹⁰Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “You have been unfaithful and have married foreign wives adding to the guilt of Israel. ¹¹Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers and do His will; and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.”

¹²Then all the assembly replied with a loud voice, “That’s right! As you have said, so it is our duty to do.

[Read v.10-15]

Q: According to v.10, does Ezra offer any excuse or mitigating circumstances for the situation?

A: No. He succinctly acknowledges the specific sin of disobedience of God’s Word.

Q: What is the promise they’re in danger of losing according to v.12?

A: Strength, prosperity and their inheritance. Another way of looking at it: Health, wealth and posterity.

Q: What is Ezra’s main point about their situation in v.13-14?

A: They’ve just come out of 7 decades of payment for sin and have apparently not learned the right lessons to stop repeating the mistakes of the past. God will therefore deal even more harshly with them because they did not learn from the examples before them.

Q: As Ezra concludes his prayer in v.15, does he make an attempt to intercede or request something specific from God?

A: He simply leaves it as “You are righteous” and “we are before You in our guilt”. He leaves it completely to God’s grace.

[Read v.10:7-12]

Q: Why were such qualifications as in v.8 placed on the people to force their participation in the meeting?

A: All of Israel was guilty for not holding each other accountable. All of Israel had to be present to rectify this. Is there a lesson for us that present-day intervention and accountability sometimes require a more aggressive pursuit?

Q: As stated previously there are 3 main action items in v.11. Is it “OK” to focus on just 1 or 2 of them and not all 3?

A: Not taking all 3 equally seriously may be the reason we have issues in our lives with which we continually struggle. For instance, we confess the sin but don’t extricate the circumstances, person or environment that entices us to repeat the sin. (No separation.) Other examples?

¹³But there are many people; it is the rainy season and we are not able to stand in the open. Nor can the task be done in one or two days, for we have transgressed greatly in this matter. ¹⁴Let our leaders represent the whole assembly and let all those in our cities who have married foreign wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and judges of each city, until the fierce anger of our God on account of this matter is turned away from us.”

[Read v.10:13-14]

Q: Are the people trying to wriggle out of their commitment to do the right thing?

A: We must be careful that in our zeal to erase our own sin that we don't create "innocent" victims in the process. The laws of divorce needed to be followed correctly – you can't keep one law by breaking another – and the women and children being sent away needed to be properly cared for.

General Applications

- 1. When we are witness to another believer's sin – even though we separate ourselves and don't join their behavior – we are still accountable for our lack of action.*
- 2. Perhaps our local ministry needs to have a focus on strengthening our commitment and sanctification in Christ – personally and corporately.*
- 3. When you have God's Word you don't need signs or miracles. What has been revealed already is enough for our obedience and to succeed in accomplishing God's work.*
- 4. God's grace isn't just about overlooking our faults or shortcomings, but providing us the opportunity to recognize and address them.*