

Ezra, Book Study

Chapters 9 & 10

Chapters 9 & 10 with Notes: NKJV

9 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.

- After his arrival and the proper accounting of all the gifts brought from Babylon, Ezra received discouraging news. The spiritual condition of the post-exile community was bad, and this was evident in their failure to separate from the pagan peoples that still populated the region. – *Enduring Word Commentary*
- This shows that the problem was not primarily *ethnic*. The problem was they did not separate themselves from these abominations, specifically the idolatry of these people. – *Enduring Word Commentary*
- “All this testified abhorrence, not merely of the act of having taken strange wives, but their having also joined them in their *idolatrous* abominations.” (Clarke)
- With this forsaking of Jewish identity and the at least partial embrace of idolatry (or its toleration in the Jewish community), in a few generations there would cease to be *any* distinctive Jewish community in the Promised Land. – *Enduring Word Commentary*

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.

- The Levites and the priests were chief among the people and were not to profane themselves in any way. For this reason, the law placed certain restrictions on them and required much of them. For example, a priest could not marry a woman who was a harlot, unclean, profane, or divorced; rather, he was required to marry a virgin from among the people, a Jewess who was a true Hebrew (see Lev. 21:4, 7, 9, 14). – *Perry Stone Hebraic Prophetic Study Bible, p. 710*
- Their failure to separate resulted in intermarriage with the surrounding pagan communities. It wasn't that this intermarriage was the *only* problem; but as these communities intermarried, there would be no areas left untouched by pagan associations – business, government, social life. To allow intermarriage with idolaters was to allow all these other areas of compromise. – *Enduring Word Commentary*

Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass.”

- Worst of all, the leaders of the community were leaders (foremost) in this sin. They were leaders, but leading in the wrong direction. – *Enduring Word Commentary*

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.

- Both Ezra and Nehemiah were confronted with the sin of pagan intermarriage. Nehemiah responded by plucking out the hair of the guilty ([Nehemiah 13:25](#)); Ezra responded by plucking out his own hair. – *Enduring Word Commentary*

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 an interesting title to give to those who had sinned. In a historical sense, they were among the captives who returned from Babylon (though many or most of them were actually born in Judea). Yet in a real spiritual sense, they were *carried away captive* by their sin of partnership with idolaters and idolatry. – *Enduring Word Commentary*
- We may see this conviction of sin on the part of the people and their leaders, and the way that the conviction of sin was phrased, to indicate (spiritually speaking) that Ezra's arrival to bring the ministry of teaching God's word was bearing fruit. The people heard the word, looked at their lives, and saw that the two did not match. – *Enduring Word Commentary*

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.

- This was the most common posture of prayer in the Old Testament. Many modern people close their eyes, bow their heads, and fold their hands as they pray, but the Old Testament tradition was to spread out the hands toward heaven in a gesture of surrender, openness, and ready reception. "With the palms open toward heaven, in a having, craving way, as beggars. This was the Jewish manner of praying, and it was very becoming." (Trapp)

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.

- Ezra considered this a terrible sin against God and "blushed" to even present a prayer to God about it (v. 6). ... Ezra had no intention of this sin coming up before God and causing Jerusalem to again encounter a series of judgments. He knew that they had a "little space" of grace and needed some "reviving" in their bondage as God's mercy was being extended to them (v. 7-9). Ezra recalled God's law that forbade intermarrying with foreign women or seeking the favor of the unclean tribes surrounding them (v. 10-15). He feared that the corruption and sin of the priesthood would anger God and consume the remnant He had preserved. After all, Jerusalem was surrounded by enemies who desired the defeat and destruction of the Jews! – *Perry Stone Hebrew Prophetic Study Bible, p. 710*

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.

- "God had been so often provoked, and had so often pardoned them and they had continued to transgress, that he was ashamed to go back again to the throne of grace to ask for mercy in their behalf. This is the genuine feeling of every reawakened *backslider*." (Clarke)

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,

- Ezra offered no excuses and not even an explanation. Their conduct was indefensible and in direct disobedience to what God commanded by His servants the prophets. – *Enduring Word Commentary*

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.'

- "Although you may fancy that this way of making leagues and marriages with them is the only way to establish and settle you, yet I assure you it will weaken and ruin you and the contrary course will make you stronger." (Poole)

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?

- As severe as the exile was, Ezra recognized that it was less than the people of God deserved. As he looked at their present disobedience, he understood that it was a way of despising the great

mercy God had shown in the past and meant they deserved a complete and final judgment. – *Enduring Word Commentary*

- As the tribes of Israel piled sin upon sin before the fall of the northern and southern kingdoms, God still showed remarkable mercy to them. He did not *have to* preserve them in exile; there could have been genocide instead. As well, He did not *have to* bring them back from exile into the Promised Land once again. Each of these was a wonderful example of God's mercy in the midst of judgment. – *Enduring Word Commentary*

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!”

- We note here that Ezra also did not claim special circumstances or did not tell God that their difficult environment made their present compromise understandable, or that all their other good works or faithfulness somehow excused their idolatry. He simply realized that “*no one can stand before You because of this!*” – *Enduring Word Commentary*

Confession of Improper Marriages

10 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.

- This shows that the people were also struck by the conviction of sin and the need to confess and repent. They sorrowed over the sin of the covenant community just as Ezra had done. – *Enduring Word Commentary*
- Confession of sins is a neglected doctrine. It only comes into its rightful place in times of revival, when the Holy Spirit comes in doubly-convicting power and makes it impossible for the erring believer to have any peace of mind until the wrong is confessed whenever necessary.” (Orr)
- In his book *The Second Evangelical Awakening*, Dr. J. Edwin Orr quoted the observations of a high-ranking army officer upon the work of the Spirit in his Scottish town: “Those of you who are at ease have little conception of how terrifying a sight it is when the Holy Spirit is pleased to open a man’s eyes to see the real state of heart.... Men who were thought to be, and who thought themselves to be good, religious people...have been led to search into the foundation upon which they were resting, and have found all rotten, that they were self-satisfied, resting on their own goodness, and not upon Christ. Many turned from open sin to lives of holiness, some weeping for joy for sins forgiven.” – *Enduring Word Commentary*
- William Newton Blair, the author of a book describing the great Korean revival, declares: “*We may have our theories of the desirability or undesirability of public confession of sin. I have had mine, but I know that when the Spirit of God falls upon guilty souls, there will be confession, and no power on earth can stop it.*” (Cited in Orr)

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. 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. ⁴ Arise, for *this matter is your responsibility*. We also *are* with you. Be of good courage, and do *it*.”

- Shechaniah recognized the severity of their sin, yet he also knew that their present brokenness over their sin was an emblem of the work of God’s Spirit among them. Thus, it was a reason **for hope in Israel** in spite of this. – *Enduring Word Commentary*
- It is interesting that Ezra himself did not suggest the course of action that Shechaniah did. Perhaps Ezra was so deeply troubled by the sin of the community that he could not think of a wise response. Perhaps Ezra knew what to do but knew that the suggestion had to come from the community itself instead of from himself, as a newcomer to Jerusalem and Judea. – *Enduring Word Commentary*

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.

⁹ So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days.

- This was an impressive response to the remarkable call Ezra made in the preceding verses. Their unified response was another evidence of the moving of the Holy Spirit among the people of God. – *Enduring Word Commentary*

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.

- The men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at the temple during a severe rainstorm, and according to Josephus it was quite cold (Book XI, chapter 5, part 4). The rain was interpreted as God's disfavor on the priests; each priest was to go to his own city to be judged by the city elders (see

Ezra 10:14). – *Perry Stone Hebraic Prophetic Study Bible, p. 710*

- This response has been seen again as the Holy Spirit has moved upon the people of God. Orr records that in March of 1859, at the beginning of a great move of God that would bring more than one million souls to conversion in Great Britain, some unordained men with a passion for revival preached at the First Presbyterian Church in Ahoghill, Northern Ireland. There was such a large crowd at that meeting that they had to dismiss the meeting out of fear that the balconies would collapse under the weight of so many people. They took the meeting to the street right outside the church, and in the freezing rain James McQuilkin preached to 3,000 people in the streets, with many of the listeners falling to their knees in the wet and muddy street because they were so moved by the conviction of sin under the preaching of these laymen. – *Enduring Word Commentary*
- The willingness of people to forsake normal comforts and to humbly assemble in adverse circumstances was another evidence of the moving of the Holy Spirit among them. – *Enduring Word Commentary*

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.

- The whole process took many weeks because so many men had taken pagan wives. The questioning was necessary because they needed to examine if one of these wives had genuinely decided to serve the Lord God and to forsake her native religions. – *Enduring Word Commentary*

- If the pagan wife had decided to keep her primary allegiance with her former people and their idols, she could not live among the covenant community and had to be divorced. – *Enduring Word Commentary*
- To the end of the chapter, there is a list showing that only about 114 of these pagan wives refused to embrace the God of Israel and had to be divorced. Yamauchi calculates that it was less than one-half of one percent of the people who were guilty of this pagan intermarriage and who had to divorce their wives. Though it was such a small percentage, it still had to be dealt with strongly – and it was. It also shows that most of the foreign wives joined the people of God in their hearts as well as their homes. – *Enduring Word Commentary*
- In the New Testament believers are also instructed to marry within the faith. Marriages to unbelievers are condemned (2 Corinthians 6:14) and widows (as one example of the unmarried) are directly commanded to marry within the faith (1 Corinthians 7:39). However, Paul specifically commanded that if a believer is married to an unbeliever, they are to remain in the marriage, if at all possible, both for the opportunity of a witness to the unbelieving spouse and for the benefit it brings to the children (1 Corinthians 7:12-17). – *Enduring Word Commentary*

Pagan Wives Put Away

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, 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; **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, ³⁶ Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, ³⁷ Mattaniah, Mattenai, Jaasai, 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, Joel, *and* Benaiah.

44 All these had taken pagan wives, and *some* of them had wives *by whom* they had children.

- Within about three months, all priests had been separated from their pagan wives. The general populace also separated from foreign wives. This separation led to the construction of a counterfeit temple in Samaria (see the article below) – *Perry Stone Hebraic Prophetic Study Bible, p. 710*
- Those who had to put away their wives (because they refused to convert) are here listed. This is a somewhat shameful list, and not a very good way to get one's name recorded in the best-selling book of all time. – *Enduring Word Commentary*
- Ezra here disappears from the Biblical record for about thirteen years, when he appears again in the Book of Nehemiah (Chapter 8). His passion then was the same as it was at the end of the Book of Ezra: to transform the people of God by bringing them the word of God. – *Enduring Word Commentary*

Counterfeit Temple in Samaria:
Perry Stone Hebraic Prophetic Study Bible, p. 712

In John's Gospel, a woman at Jacob's well in Samaria confronted Christ to ask which mountain was the true mountain of worship to God (see John 4:4-26). The Jews worshipped on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem where two temples had been constructed - Solomon's Temple and the temple rebuilt under Ezra's and Nehemiah's leadership. The Samaritans worshipped on Mount Gerizim, where a rival temple had once existed. This temple is a part of history and not mentioned in the Scripture.

Samaria had been the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel after the ten tribes separated from Judah in the time of King Rehoboam, Solomon's son. After the ten tribes were scattered abroad by the Assyrians, Samaria became a city filled with foreigners from numerous nations of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires (see 2 Kings 17:24).

When the Jews returned from Babylon, the foreign inhabitants of the land offered the Jews assistance in rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, but their offer was rejected (see Ezra 4:1-3; see also Neh. 2:19-20). Afterwards the leaders from Samaria began hindering the rebuilding efforts. According to Nehemiah 13:28, one of the Jewish priests in Jerusalem had married the daughter of Sanballat, the governor of Samaria who had caused such distress for the Jewish workers as they tried to rebuild. When Ezra and Nehemiah demanded the Jewish priests to separate from their foreign wives, this priest refused and moved to Samaria. The Samaritans at that point built their own temple on Mount Gerizim, which according to Josephus was a replica of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and was surrounded by fortifications. This structure was completed in the fifth century BC (Josephus, Antiquities; Book XII, chapter 5; Encyclopedia Judaica, 1972, Volume 14).

This temple stood for about two hundred years until it was destroyed in about 128 BC by John Hyrcanus, who also devastated the area of Samaria. When Christ met the woman at Jacob's well, the temple had been gone for years, but ruins of the buildings still existed on Mount Gerizim and some people still thought the mountain was the place to worship.