

April 11, 2021

“The Faith-in-Action Preacher”
Lesson 6 of Unit

Ezra 10:1-12

Intro

The Babylonians overtake Jerusalem and take the people of Israel into captivity in 586 BC. About four decades later, the Persian king Cyrus defeats the Babylonians and releases the Jewish exiles to return home, specifically to rebuild the temple. The first group goes home in 538 BC. A second group, led by Ezra (the focus of today's lesson), leaves in 458 BC. The final group, led by Nehemiah, returns in 444 BC.

In chapter 9, Ezra is made aware of a very serious sin being committed: intermarriage with people not of the nation of Israel. That is specifically warned against in Deuteronomy 7 because of the different beliefs and religious practices of these peoples. Ezra's response and call to the people is what today's lesson is all about.

Read Ezra 10:1-12

1. vs. 1: Ezra's reactions begin in chapter 9 (worth reading for background)

Here, he prays, confessing the nation's sins to God
He weeps, showing how deeply these sins have affected him
He bows down, maybe even lying flat on the ground before the temple
This is the temple rebuilt by the returning exiles
It was completed in 515 BC, almost 60 years before Ezra comes back
This is the temple destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD

A large crowd of all ages gathers around him

Ezra's sincere heart and grief over the people's sins draws others to join him
The crowd weeps “bitter tears” just as Ezra does

2. vs. 2: A man named Shechaniah speaks to Ezra

He appears to speak for the people; no other person in the crowd is named
He is a descendent of David (1 Chr. 3:1)

His father, Jehiel, was one named as guilty of intermarriage in 10:26

He appears to be speaking of the people's guilt from a very personal place

“Unfaithful” regularly refers to violating the covenant relationship with God

The “foreign women” are those not of Israel, but surround pagan groups

There is provision for people not of Israel to become part (proselytes)

These women have not chosen to join Israel and the covenant of God

Shechaniah says, “In spite of this (sin), there is still hope

God has forgiven them before

If they repent and ask for forgiveness, God will forgive them again

There is still hope despite how bad the situation looks

3. vs. 3: Shechaniah encourages following the covenant

He talks about making a covenant

It seems more likely correct that he means returning to God's way

Following the covenant God had established with His people

Putting the foreign women away (sending them back to their people)

Solomon's foreign wives led him away from God

There is a necessity to avoid that pattern that caused the captivity

"Do it according to the Law"

There is nothing cruel about what Shechaniah proposes

There are guidelines in Deuteronomy and Leviticus about this action

4. vs. 4: Finally, Shechaniah encourages Ezra to act

"Rise up"

He also recognizes that Ezra is the authority figure to announce what will happen

"it is in your hands"

He pledges the support of the people as Ezra takes this difficult steps

"We will support you, so take courage and do it"

5. vs. 5: Ezra's first action

Has the leaders, priests and Levites, and "all Israel" (lay people?) swear to this oath

This action won't be taken or instituted by Ezra alone

All the people must be on the same page

6. vs. 6: Ezra next goes into the house of God to fast and pray

It doesn't say he prays; it does say he mourned the people's unfaithfulness

It's likely and believable that he did this through prayer

His fasting is also a sign of his grieving over the people's sins

7. vs. 7-8: A proclamation was issued

All to assemble in Jerusalem within three days

The short amount of time indicates the importance of what must happen

Those who don't come will suffer serious consequences

Property will be taken (forfeited)

Expelled from the assembly (not allowed to attend)

These two would cause one to wander to foreign lands

They would no longer have any standing in Israel

8. vs. 9: Those who come are only from Judah and Benjamin

They assemble outdoors in front of the temple

The 9th month is early December

Rain is typical in Jerusalem at that time of year (like in Oregon!)

The people are trembling both because of the serious situation and from the rain

9. vs. 10: Ezra is a priest and a teacher of the Law

He is knowledgeable

He reminds the people of what they did to cause God's anger

10. vs. 11: Honoring God means doing things His way

The first thing is to agree with Him that they have sinned against Him

The second thing is to abide by the covenant

Separate from the foreign wives

11. vs. 12: The people's response

"You are right!"

They agree with Ezra's words, showing agreement with God's Law

"We must do as you say"

They commit themselves to doing what is required to follow God faithfully

Application: What happens in today's passage happens multiple times in the Old Testament. The people sin in not following God's Law, there are negative consequences, the people cry out, God rescues / redeems, and the people vow to follow the Law (keep the covenant). Sounds a little familiar, doesn't it?

This study has told us how Ezra led the people back into a proper relationship with God. We too ought to examine our lives regularly for areas we may have drifted away from God by entering into "mixed marriages". The things Ezra commanded the people to do are the very things God asks of us as well: confess, repent, recommit.

Prayer: Father God, help us to see our actions through Your eyes, so that we see what is ungodly and displeasing to You. Help us to engage in acts of repentance quickly. Forgive us where we have strayed, and help us to be ever more faithful to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.