

Lesson 6 – Confession and Repentance-The Conditions for Revival

February 7, 2021

Background Passage: Ezra 10

Lesson Passage: Ezra 10:1-14 (KJV)

Background: The book of Ezra, in conjunction with Nehemiah, records the fulfillment of God's promise to restore His people to their land after seventy years of Babylonian captivity. It was He who "stirred up the spirit" of Cyrus II (Ezra 1:1) to permit any willing Israelite to return to his land. And it was God who later prompted Darius I (Ezra 6:14, 22) and Artaxerxes I (Ezra 7:11-13ff) to decree similarly (Ezra 9:9). The rebuilding of the altar and the temple (Ezra 3-6), and the offering of sacrifices, receive considerable attention in Ezra. So, also the joy and exuberance of the people (Ezra 3:10-13; 6:22). But religious reform is essentially meaningless in Israelite theology without spiritual and ethical reform. Marriages to foreign women, though forbidden in the law of Moses (Ezra 9:11-12), were rampant during Ezra's time and posed an enormous threat to Israel's future commitment to remain true to YHWH. The solution was drastic, yet necessary. After Ezra's lengthy confession to God and plea for His mercy (Ezra 9:5-15), the people decide to put their foreign wives away (Ezra 10:19). Thus, the religious purity of the people was restored, if ever so briefly, through the work of Ezra. The overall focus in Ezra, then, is on the return of the Lord's people to (1) the worship of the God who keeps His covenant; (2) to the land He promised to give His people; and (3) to religious and ethical purity.

Introduction: Throughout Scripture, both repentance and confession have prepared the way for spiritual revival. God has always prepared His people to do a great work for Him by leading them to godly sorrow for their sins. Once we acknowledge our sins and confess them, we are on track to have victory over them. In Acts, we see the importance of true repentance in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. During the weeks before Pentecost, the disciples earnestly sought God in prayer. Acts 1:14 says that they were in "*one accord in prayer and supplication.*" This experience of "*one accord*" reveals a strong unity and harmony among Christ's followers that would not have been possible without repentance and confession. Prayer and confession prepared them for what was going to come. Repentance and confession are common themes throughout Acts (Acts 17:30-31; 26:19-20). It is "the goodness of God" that leads us to repentance. It is the convicting power of the Holy Spirit that brings us to the realization of our need for a sin pardoning Savior. The Holy Spirit fills hearts, emptied of selfish ambition, of the desire for personal recognition, and of the drive for personal glory.

Scripture Reference: Ezra 10:1-14 (KJV)

1 Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore. 2 And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. 3 Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. 4 Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it. 5 Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware. 6 Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away. 7 And they made proclamation throughout

Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem; 8 And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away. 9 Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain. 10 And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel. 11 Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives. 12 Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do. 13 But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing. 14 Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us.

Memory Verse: *“Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away”. (Ezra 10:6) KJV*

Topic Explored: *“Confession and Repentance – The Conditions for Revival”* Repentance is a God-initiated sorrow for sin. It also includes a decision to forsake whatever specific sins that the Holy Spirit brings to mind (Ezekiel 14:6, Zechariah 1:4). Genuine repentance does not lead Christians into a state of deep depression because of their sinful natures or deeds. It leads us, instead, to focus on Jesus’ righteousness, not our sinfulness. Throughout the New Testament, the enormity of our sin is never greater than the enormity of His grace. For “where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (Romans 5:20, NKJV). Genuine repentance is always accompanied by confession of specific sins. The Holy Spirit does not give us vague feelings of guilt. He convicts us of our definite shortcomings. The purpose of the convicting power of the Holy Spirit is to reveal our need of the saving grace of Christ. Repentance does not make God love us more; rather, it enables us to appreciate His love more. Confession does not earn God’s forgiveness; it instead enables us to receive His forgiveness. God does not love us more when we repent or love us less when we fail to. His love for us is constant. The only variable is our response to the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Lesson Explored: Ezra 10:1-14 (KJV)

Verses 1-4 ~ In our lesson setting, repentance required giving up the unscriptural wives. In Chapter 9, the returned exiles had discovered a serious spiritual problem in their midst. Many men, including many leaders of the nation, had married wives of foreign nations in disobedience to the law. Ezra had mourned for the sin and prayed to God at length confessing the people’s evil. As Ezra continued in this prayer, a large group of people assembled and joined him in grieving for the sin, weeping bitterly. This chapter describes the solution to the problem that was determined and, in so doing, shows us important principles about removing sin from God’s people and spiritual restoration of those who have departed from God’s way. In particular, it shows us what needs to be done when people have committed the sin of entering into sinful marriages, which they have no right to enter. The solution was proposed by a man named Shechaniah (dweller with Jehovah). Nothing else is known about this man, but he was a wise and courageous man to propose the solution. First, he acknowledged what had been done and that it was a sin: men had married people from the surrounding forbidden nations (Ezra 9:2). Yet he said there was hope. Even in time of the deepest sin, there is hope if people are willing to turn

from sin. He said the people who were guilty needed to repent, and the only way to overcome the harm done and do proper restitution was to put away the foreign wives and their children. He proposed that they make a covenant with God to do this. This would be done according to the law and according to the guidance of those who tremble at God's law (Ezra 9:4). Note that repentance required giving up the wives, since the marriages themselves were illegitimate. They could not continue in the marriages because they had no right to be in them. They were forbidden because the foreign wives would influence the men of Israel to worship idols and commit other pagan sins. So long as the marriages continued, the sin would continue. So, the only solution was to get out of the marriages. This was done by means of a covenant before God - a solemn promise and commitment before Him (2 Chronicles 34:31).

Verses 5-8 ~ "*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. The counsel of Shechaniah seemed good to Ezra, so he immediately called upon the people to swear an oath to do according to this word. 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, who was a newcomer to Jerusalem and Judea. Shechaniah advised the actions of repentance, more than simply indulging the feelings of brokenness. The counsel of Shechaniah seemed good to Ezra, so he immediately called upon the people to swear an oath to do according to this word. Significantly, Ezra began with the leaders; he expected them to make things right with God first. For Ezra, this tragedy was as bad as if someone had died. He could not think of himself or his own needs when he knew God was being so greatly dishonored. We can say that Ezra observed a complete fast, abstaining from both food and water. Ezra was given great civil authority by King Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:26). Here he put that authority to use by making the people fulfill the oath they had previously made (Ezra 10:5). Significantly, Ezra began with the leaders; he expected them to make things right with God first.

Verses 9-11 ~ Ezra makes his appeal to the trembling assembly. This was a remarkable 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. 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. Ezra's word to the people was clear and strong. Though the moving of the Holy Spirit was evident, it was important to carry the work through to completion and to not be satisfied with a partial work. This was a clear call to both *confession* and *repentance*.

Verses 12-14 ~ The response of the assembly: Yes! As you have said, so we must do: This was still another evidence of the remarkable moving of the Holy Spirit upon the people. They immediately answered (and with a loud voice) in agreement to what Ezra said. The people asked Ezra for the time to make it right. This was necessary because so many people were involved in this sin; yet the principle was agreed upon with very little opposition.

Life Applications/Let's Talk:

1. **Can guilt be both good and bad?** (*Possible Answer: It all depends. If the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, and the guilt of that sin drives us to Jesus, guilt is good. If we have already confessed our sin and continue to feel guilty, the guilt may become destructive*)

2. **There are times we may have confessed our sins and we still feel guilty. Why?** *(Possible Answer: One reason might be that the devil is attempting to rob us of the assurance of salvation. He loves to steal away the blessed assurance of forgiveness and salvation that we have in Jesus. Secondly, the Holy Spirit may be pointing out something between us and another individual. If we have hurt another individual, our troubled conscience will be eased when we confess our wrong to the person whom we have hurt).*

Application(s)

- There can be no genuine repentance unless there is corresponding reformation in the life. There must be a putting away of sin.

Closing Prayer: *Lord, God, Jehovah! How we do praise and glorify Your Name! We thank you for the provision You made for us to come to You and confess our sins and be forgiven. We confess right now that we have sinned and are repenting of the sins. We ask that You cover us with the righteousness of Your Precious Son, that we might receive forgiveness and restoration, that we might receive more strength for the journey. In His Name, we pray, Amen!"*

~~Notes~~
