

## A Journey Through Ezra and Nehemiah

### Ezra 9-10: Disobedience, Repentance and Covenant

#### *The Big Picture:*

These two final chapters of Ezra are serious and sombre. The law that Ezra teaches convicts the people of their disobedience.

How had they disobeyed God?

They had failed to separate themselves from the neighbouring peoples. These surrounding peoples did not know or acknowledge the holiness of the Lord God and they did not worship Him. The returned exiles disobeyed the law of God by intermarrying with them (the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites). Those who married into the nation of Israel did not worship the Lord God but continued to worship the idols of their own people. Remember God's Ten Commandments (read them in Exodus 20). This idolatry would have comprised all aspects of the life of the people of God.

In Ezra 9-10 we read about the 'holy seed' or 'holy offspring' (the remnant of the people of Israel) having broken faith with the Lord and His law. Ezra leads the people in repentance before the Lord for their disobedience to His laws. We don't just read of the peoples' repentance; we read of the sorrowful reparation they make for their disobedience.

#### Read Ezra 9

#### *Ezra Prays:*

Ezra is distraught at the disobedient actions of the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites. He falls down before the Lord, rends his garments, stretches out his hands and prays to the Lord. His words are brutally honest and moving. He lays everything out before the Lord God. How often do we hold back from God rather than laying it all out before Him? Maybe there are things today in our own lives we need to be brutally honest about before God in prayer...

Ezra 9:2 speaks of a 'Holy race,' a 'holy seed,' or 'holy offspring.' This literally means those belonging to the family of God: the remnant of the nation of Israel.

We know that the women the exiles intermarried with hadn't left their unbelieving, idolatrous ways behind in order to worship God. Others foreigners had and had been welcomed into the worshipping community of Israel. Look back at Ezra 6:21. There were those from the surrounding lands who had become part of the family of God. They worshipped the Lord God and turned away from unbelief. These people were fully accepted and included within the family of God. Think about Rahab and Ruth – both were foreigners and strangers to Israel but became followers of God and are included in the Genealogy of Christ at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel.

## **Read Ezra 10**

### ***Repentance and Sending Away:***

The people respond in repentance and reparation. They recommit themselves to the law of God and to His covenant.

This is a difficult episode to read. It might make us feel quite uncomfortable, partly because we don't know what happened to the women and children who were sent away. It is most likely that they returned to their own people and families. Our modern selves might not understand the actions described in Ezra chapter 10. We do, however, have to be mindful of the culture of the day. We can certain principles away from the chapter. This include: remaining faithful to a faithful God; being mindful of the promises God has made to us; striving to be holy and pure of heart, soul, mind and body; and keeping the Word of the Lord always before us.

It is clear in Ezra 9-10 that the sin and disobedience of the people of Israel was great and that because of this sin and disobedience the people had to repent. They had broken their covenant with God the Father; they needed to turn back to the ways of God remembering the covenant they had with God. This was a covenant that had been established to ensure that the family of Israel would prosper and flourish.

### ***God's Covenant***

God's covenants with His people require their obedience but depend on God's faithfulness. In Ezra's last chapters, the people have 'broken faith' (Ezra 9:2 & 10:2, 10) with their God – they have broken His covenant with them. We are glad to read of their renewed will to obey but we know that they will not and cannot perfectly keep the covenant they have just made – as we will see in the book of Nehemiah. We are reminded here both of God's steadfast love to a people who break faith and of God's faithfulness to his covenant with these people, a covenant to be finally fulfilled only through His Son, Jesus Christ.

### ***Holy Seed***

This 'holy seed' (Ezra 9:2) grows and makes a pathway throughout the Scriptures, from God the Father leading to Christ alone. After Adam and Eve sinned, God decreed that the 'offspring' ('seed') of the woman would one day bruise the head of the Serpent (Genesis 3:15). God promised Abraham that his 'offspring/seed' would be great, blessed by God and bringing blessing to all nations, dwelling in the land of promise (Genesis 12:1-7; 15:1-6). In Galatians, Paul explains that Christ is Abraham's offspring. Paul also carefully explains that 'if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promises (Galatians 3:29).'

### ***Some questions for reflection:***

1. Ezra 9: Ezra takes the Word of God and the actions of the people very seriously. In what ways do we take God's Word seriously as His people today?
2. Ezra 9:6-15: How would you sum up what Ezra is saying about God's people and about God?

3. Ephesians 5:1-14: How does Paul call followers of Jesus (Christ's called-out people) to live in the world today?
4. Before we move on to Nehemiah, take time to look over what we have covered in the book of Ezra. How has the Lord been speaking to you and teaching you over the last few weeks? What has been comforting/encouraging/challenging you? What lessons will you take with you into the future?

Feel free to get in touch to share what you have learned and what you have been reflecting on during our study. You can email Mark at [revmarkmccconnell@gmail.com](mailto:revmarkmccconnell@gmail.com) and/or Emma at [revemaycarson@gmail.com](mailto:revemaycarson@gmail.com).

*The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-26*

*Yours in faith and love,*

*Rev Emma*