

The Painful Price of Revival

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from **Jerry Vines Ministries**
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Let's Begin

Ezra had successfully done the will of God in leading a second remnant of Jews back to Jerusalem from Babylon. He had to have been filled with joy to be back in the Promised Land. But his joy was short-lived because he soon received a report of sin among the people. As we will read in the opening verses of Ezra 9, the children of Israel had begun marrying the people of the land. This was something they had been specifically forbidden by God to do. It was because they had a different faith and value system than the people around them. They were to be a separate people. Their intermarriages with these pagan nations only compromised their faith and corrupted their values.

Ezra had a definite problem. He was going to have to deal with the sin among the people. As we use the outline below, we will see how Ezra handles this problem. We will also see that when sin is dealt with, it is a painful process. And it is costly. But sin must be dealt with if God's children are to receive His blessings instead of His chastening. Sin must be dealt with before there can be revival.

I. Sin Confronted (9:1-4)

II. Sin Confessed (9:5-15)

III. Sin Cleansed (10:1-44)

I. Sin Confronted (9:1-4)

The princes or leaders of the children of Israel are the ones who bring the news to Ezra of the people intermarrying (9:1). They had “not separated themselves.” Verse 1 continues to give us more information. It was not just one group of forbidden people the Jews had married, but eight different people groups (cp. Deut. 7:1-6)! All of these nations were unbelievable in their depravity (cp. Deut. 12:29-32). And what was even worse was the fact that the priests and

Levites, their spiritual leaders, were involved in this sin.

When a person is in a position of leadership, he or she has a higher standard of accountability (James 3:1). One of the reasons is it is a doubly terrible thing when those who are in leadership are involved in sin. Their sin has the potential to affect and hurt so many more people than a person who is not in leadership. Every believer should desire and strive to live a holy and separate life, especially those in leadership.

What Ezra does next is a lesson every one of us should note. He did not call the people together and preach a sermon. Instead, he mourns over the people's sin (9:3). Tearing his clothes and pulling his hair from his beard and head means he was broken-hearted. The scene is a typical Oriental or Middle Eastern scene of mourning. They are much more expressive and outward in their grief than we are here in the West. Ezra is a man who is grieved over the sin among his people. He understands the



seriousness of the sin. And he knows the sin is going to have to be confronted.

One of the things that is so disturbing today is that not many people are shocked by sin anymore. We have become so acclimated and accustomed to sin that it doesn't seem to bother us. It is important to understand that whether the American people are disturbed by it or not, God is disturbed about sin. And God's children ought to be disturbed about it. We have witnessed a wearing away of convictions in America, even among believers. Those things that used to outrage and shock us are now just common and ordinary.

A group of people gather together around Ezra as he sits there with a broken heart (9:4).

They are described as those "that trembled at the words of the God of Israel." It is telling us they had a respect and reverence for God's Word. They also knew God meant what He said in His Word. They understood this sin was an abomination to Him. They also, no doubt, were remembering God had judged and punished

their forefathers for their sins. That is why they had spent 70 years in captivity. They had to wonder if they were headed for judgment again.

Reflection Connection

Read Isaiah 66:2b and 5 and discuss if believers in America today tremble at God's Word. Why or why not?

It is important to understand that whether the American people are disturbed by it or not, God is disturbed about sin.

II. Sin Confessed (9:5-15)

The next thing we read is one of the great confession prayers in the Bible (9:6-15). It is one of three "chapter 9" chapters in the Bible that is significant for its confession prayer. The other two are Nehemiah's prayer in Nehemiah 9 and Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9.

Ezra's prayer is not a long prayer. The great English preacher Charles Spurgeon once said, "It is not the length of your prayer, but the strength of your prayer which wins with

God." That is what we see here. First, Ezra falls on his knees and spreads out his hands to the Lord (9:5). He is showing his humility before God. In verse 6 he begins, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens." Ezra himself was not specifically involved in the sin, but he confesses "our iniquities" and "our trespass." In verse 7 he talks about "our iniquities." He was a spiritual leader who was

willing to identify himself with the sins of his people.

Ezra also says he is ashamed and blushes to lift up his face. He was a man who could blush at or be embarrassed by sin. Jeremiah, who prophesied before the children of Israel were taken captive by the Babylonians, said, "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not ashamed at all, neither could they blush ..." (Jer. 6:15). He was saying sin no longer bothered them. When



a nation gets to the point that it can't blush or be embarrassed by sin, it's in a dangerous condition. When a nation begins to laugh over things it ought to weep over, that nation is in bad shape. We need to pray that we will be so sensitive to sin that we will blush over it. We need to pray that we will be ashamed and embarrassed by it.

Ezra also talks about the captivity of sin (9:7). He knew the Jews' iniquities had brought them into captivity. Instead of being the great God-fearing kingdom of Israel, they had been at the mercy of pagan kings. Instead of being a testimony for the Lord, they had become an embarrassment and disgrace. In verse 8 he says, "And now for a little space grace hath been showed from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage." The Lord had given them grace, far more than they deserved. God had also given them a nail in His holy place. Their temple, which was known as the "house of God" (cp. 6:3), was their source of strength and security. The Lord had brought them back to Jerusalem because He wanted to bless them with new joy and life. He had given them a little revival. They should have known better than to do what they did.

Ezra understands God had shown mercy to them (9:9). Their returning to Jerusalem and

the favor of the Persian kings was because of the Lord. He also understands how great the people's sins are. He doesn't know what to say, realizing after all the Lord had done for them they still had chosen to sin (9:10).

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Remember, Ezra was not only a priest, but he had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord (cp. 7:10). He knew what God had commanded through Moses and His prophets. The people living in the land had defiled it with their detestable practices (9:11). And the children of Israel had been clearly instructed not to marry any of them (9:12; cp. Deut. 7:1-6). He continues and says God hadn't punished them nearly what their sins had deserved (9:13). Ezra understood the holiness and justice of God. Today, many people want to demand their rights. What they don't understand is that to demand their rights before God is to condemn themselves to an eternity in hell. We need God's mercy.

Ezra says in verse 14, "Should we again break thy commandments?" He is saying the children of Israel never seemed to learn. Isn't that a picture of so many believers today? We know the Bible teaches us that sin brings sorrow, and sin brings heartache. Yet we just keep going right back to sin.

Ezra also fears God would be so angry with Israel this time that He would completely destroy them (9:14b). He concludes his prayer, "O Lord God of Israel, thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee because of this" (9:15). Ezra knows God is right in doing whatever He decides to do.

Did you notice in his prayer Ezra didn't make a single request of the Lord? He just confesses their sins. He doesn't ask God for anything. He just throws himself and Israel on the mercy of the Lord. That is what we need to do in America. We need to ask God to be merciful to us and not punish us according to what we deserve.

Reflection Connection:

Discuss how Ezra's prayer is similar to 2 Chronicles 7:14. What can we learn from both of these prayers for America today?



III. Sin Cleansed (10:1-44)

As Ezra is praying, many of the children of Israel gather around him and also begin mourning (10:1). Their sins had been confronted and confessed. Now they are ready to cleanse the congregation of sin. Shechaniah becomes the spokesman for the group (10:2). His name will not be listed with those who had sinned (cp. 10:18-43), but he follows Ezra's example of confession. He says "we" when talking about their sins. He understands their sins are against God, but he also understands there is hope. Psalm 147:11 reminds us, "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy." That is what Shechaniah is doing.

In verses 3 and 4 Shechaniah states the people will divorce their pagan wives and do whatever Ezra tells them to do. He is saying they want to obey the Lord. And he knows Ezra will guide them according to God's Word. In verse 5 Ezra gets up. Remember he has been on his knees in prayer. The very first thing he does is to make sure everyone is in agreement with what Shechaniah has just said. He starts with the priests and Levites. Why? They were the leading offenders in Israel's sin. After everyone promises to take care of the sin, Ezra goes into a chamber in the temple (10:6). He is still a burdened preacher

mourning over the people's sin. And he understands the gravity of what needs to be done.

In verses 7 and 8 the children of Israel make a proclamation for everyone to gather together in Jerusalem within three days.

The word confession means "to agree with God." It means to say the same thing about sin that God says about sin.

They were gathering together as a people to confess their sin to the Lord. Those who refused to come would forfeit their inheritance as an Israelite. So everyone gathers, and it's not a very pleasant gathering (10:9). In the last part of verse 9, it says they were trembling because of the seriousness of their sin and also because of the great or heavy rain. The ninth month would have been in the winter. This is when Israel had the heaviest rain and the coldest weather.

With everyone gathered together, Ezra stands up and addresses the

people's sin (10:10). He does not sugarcoat it, but tells them they have sinned. He has made confession and tells them it is time for them to make confession (10:11). The word confession means "to agree with God." It means to say the same thing about sin that God says about sin. Today we like to make up cute little names for sin. And we are good with making excuses for our sins. But if we want our sins to be forgiven and be right with the Lord, we have to call sin what God calls it. We have to see sin the way God sees it.

The good news is that the children of Israel are willing to call their intermarrying for what it was, sin (10:12). Because they know so many of them are involved in this sin, it is going to take more than a day or two to make everything right (10:13-15). This is a reminder that sin is not as easy to deal with as we think it is.

It is so easy to get ourselves into sin. It is not nearly as easy to get ourselves out of it. The devil never tells us that. He never lets us know when we go into sin how hard it's going to be to get out of sin. He never tells us what it is going to cost us. That is why people think they can play with fire and not get burned. We never want to play around with sin. God will



forgive us, but our sins come with consequences. And many times these consequences are serious. The children of Israel were saying it was going to take awhile to put away all their pagan wives. A group of them oppose the plans (10:15). But the others are ready to put away their sin. Ezra chooses leaders to help, and it takes them three months to put away their foreign wives (10:16-17).

Verses 18 through 44 give us a long list of names. It is a list of everyone involved in the sin

of marrying pagan wives. It is interesting that the book of Ezra started with a list of Israelites who returned to Jerusalem. It closes with a list of Israelites who want to make things right with God. They want revival.

Reflection Connection

Discuss reasons the Israelites possibly used as excuses for marrying the pagan wives. How are these like the excuses Christians use for their sins today? How can we resist these excuses?

Wrap Up

The book of Ezra stops abruptly with verse 44, "All these had taken strange wives: and some of them had wives by whom they had children." It was not just husbands and wives affected by the sin of intermarrying. The children who were born into these homes also suffered because of the sins of their fathers. We can only imagine the pain the families endured. This verse is a somber reminder of the high price of sin. That is because there is no easy way to deal with sin. This is most clearly seen when Jesus paid for our sins on Calvary.

Let's ask the Lord to help us learn from the mistakes the Jews made in Ezra's time. And as we live our Christian lives, let's confess our sins on a daily basis and keep things right with God. It is much better to do this than to have to pay the painful price for revival.

