

Notes on Ezra Chapter 9

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III. The People Put Away Wives and Children of Foreign Blood - Chap. 9,10

Verses 1,2

1. What problem was brought to Ezra in vv 1,2?
2. List other **passages** and explain the Old Testament teaching about this.
3. Application: What problems can occur today when Christians marry people who are not Christians?
4. Who led in this sin (v2)? What can we learn about the importance of example?

The sin of intermarriage is discovered

Ezra had brought the group of exiles back in chap. 8, and the first thing that is recorded as happening was a major problem. So often, when we rejoice in having received a great blessing or achieved a good work, the devil soon seeks to defeat or discourage us by problems.

The law had required that the people of Israel were not to marry the people of the nations that they were to defeat and remove from the land (the nations listed in v1). The purpose of this was to keep their evil influence from leading the Israelites to sin especially in idolatry (see v12; Deuteronomy 7:1-5; Exodus 23:32; 34:12-16; Leviticus 18:24-30; Joshua 23:12,13; Nehemiah 13:23-27). However, the people in Judah had committed this sin, and the leaders and rulers of the people had been the most guilty.

Sin is always tragic. Serious consequences so often follow. This is true of all sins, even sins by those who make no claim to be God's people. But sin is especially tragic when it is committed by the people of God, because they are the ones who have professed allegiance to God and who therefore ought to be most faithful. Worst of all is when the leaders of God's people are involved. When the leaders go astray, they often lead the other people astray, setting a bad example, and failing to demand purity of the people. Elders, preachers, teachers, and mature Christians need to learn this lesson. See Acts 20:28-30; 1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Peter 5:1-3.

The New Testament does not contain a direct and express prohibition against marriage to people who are not Christians, like the Old Testament passages listed above (though some believe there are indirect prohibitions of it). But the practice ought to be avoided today, because it often leads to consequences exactly like these Old Testament passages warn against.

Furthermore, there are many problems, dangers and temptations to one who marries a non-Christian. There may be conflicts over how to raise the kids, how much to give to the church, whether or not to attend all the services or whether to attend a denomination, what moral standards we will follow, who our closest friends will be, even where we will live (in a town with no faithful church?), etc.

And even if there is no direct conflict in these matters, still the one who is not a Christian does not share that which is most important in life to the Christian – a relationship with God. The Christian must live with the daily knowledge that the dearest person on earth to him/her is destined for eternal punishment, and the non-Christian's example works against the Christian in raising the children and teaching the lost, etc. Surely we can see that a Christian would be foolish to put himself in such a situation, yet it happens time and time again.

Verses 3,4

5. How did Ezra and others react to this news (vv 3,4)?

The righteous grieve over the sin

Ezra was deeply grieved over this sin by the people. He tore his clothes and plucked out some of his hair and beard. This were signs of great grief. All others who respected God's words

came together with him to grieve. They are said to tremble at the word of God – cf. Isaiah 66:2; Ezra 10:3. They realized the severe consequences of disobedience to God.

People who are aware of the sins committed by others ought to feel great grief. It is right that we should grieve over sin. Sin is terrible in what it does to our lives, our eternal destinies, and especially our relationship to God. People who do not grieve over sin are people who are not likely to live apart from sin.

This sin in particular brought grave consequences in this life, even if people are willing to repent of it, as we will see. We will also see that the sin of unscriptural divorce and remarriage today likewise brings grave consequences. The situation is tragic in that the people involved are going to suffer greatly for their sin either in this life or in eternity (or both). It is truly a cause for grief.

Verses 5-9

6. How bad did Ezra feel (v6)? How did he describe the people's guilt and the consequences (v7)?
7. What blessing had God given them anyway (vv 8,9)?
8. **Define** "remnant." What remnant did Ezra refer to here?

Ezra confesses the sin to God

Not only had Ezra torn his clothing and plucked out hair, but he had also been fasting. Fasting is a way of showing grief. It is also a way, when accompanied by prayer, of making especially serious requests to God and showing extreme sorrow for sin (cf. 10:6).

At the time of the evening sacrifice, Ezra went to God in prayer over this matter. It is always right to go to God in prayer about our problems, especially spiritual problems and times of great spiritual needs. Those who care about God's will, and who therefore grieve over sin, will naturally be driven to prayer when they see sins, especially such grave ones affecting so many people as in this case. And those who commit the sin must pray to God to be forgiven (Acts 8:22; Matthew 6:12; 21:28-32; 2 Corinthians 7:10; 1 John 1:8-10; Proverbs 28:13).

Ezra deeply expressed his grief in prayer (cf. Daniel 9:7,8). He fell to his knees, spread out his hands toward God, and was too ashamed to even lift his face to God. The people were so guilty He could not face God. He said their sins had covered their heads and risen to the heavens (Psalms 38:4; 2 Chron. 28:9).

Ezra recalled that which God obviously knew – that the nation had frequently sinned against God, and for those sins God had sent them into captivity (Psalms 106:6; 2 Chron. 36:14-17; Daniel 9:5,6). Even the kings and priests had been sent to the sword (death), plunder, captivity, and humiliation. You would think they would have learned the lesson to avoid sin.

Now, by God's grace they had just been allowed to return from captivity. Ezra had just led a group of exiles back from captivity. This was a revival granted by God's mercy through the Persians. God had allowed them to return to rebuild the temple and the city wall (as in the book of Ezra).

Yet for all these punishments and mercies, here they are in sin again! Though they had been slaves, God had not forsaken them. Surely they ought to have known better than to turn around and go right back into the kind of sin that led to idolatry and led to captivity.

How many times are Christians today likewise guilty? We too are all sinners saved by the grace of God. We deserve to be punished eternally for our sins, just as Israel deserved captivity. Yet by His great mercy God sent Jesus to die for us and offer us the hope of eternal life, which we surely do not deserve. Yet how often do we just go right back into sin, even sometimes knowing we should not do so?

Note that Ezra refers to those who had returned as a "remnant" (v8; cf. v15). A remnant is a small part that somehow has been left over from some larger substance. In this case, the greater part of Israel had been destroyed for sin and remained in captivity. Those who returned were a

small part of the group. This concept of a remnant is common in Biblical teaching to refer to the small part of those who maintain a relationship with God (cf. Rom. 9:27). Yet in this case, a major part even of the remnant had sinned. How tragic!

Verses 10-15

9. What command did Ezra say they had broken (vv 9-12)?

10. Why was Ezra especially upset by the sin in this case (vv 13-15)?

Ezra's summary of the people's guilt

But for all God's goodness in returning the people from captivity, now they again had forsaken His commands. Specifically, God had warned them that the land was unclean, having been defiled by the sins of the people, especially idolatry. Therefore, He had commanded them to separate themselves from the people of the land so as to avoid their sins. Yet Israel had again committed sin; instead of separating themselves from the people, they had intermarried with them. God had expressly forbidden this because of the iniquities and abominations of the people of the land (see references on v2). Had they maintained separation and purity, God would have kept them in the land to receive its great blessings even for future generations. But they had been cast out of the land because of sin.

After all that God had done to punish the people for their previous sins, and then delivered them from that punishment, you would surely think the people would know better than to go back into sin now. How could they so presume on His mercy? Did they think he would spare them now? Ezra affirms that surely such sin would lead God to be so angry He would consume them and this time leave no remnant.

Note that Ezra says God punished them less than they deserve (v13; cf. Psalms 103:10). This is a description of grace. Grace leads God to offer us salvation and forgiveness despite the fact we deserve punishment. Hence, it is unmerited or undeserved favor. What we deserve is punishment.

And then note again the reference to the returned exile as a "remnant" (vv 14,15; see notes on v8).

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