

FPFWC Christian Development



Prophets of Restoration

April 2021

Spring Quarter

April 10, 2021

Lesson #2 – The Faith-In-Action Preacher

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Ezra 10:1-12

ICE BREAKER –

1. In what ways can you better support a fellow Christian in taking action to repent of sins?
2. What are some common patterns of rationalization?

Key Verse: “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

LESSON BACKGROUND

Under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian Empire overtook Jerusalem and exiled the people of Israel in 586 BC (see lesson 8 Lesson Context). Eventually, the Persian King Cyrus defeated Babylon. He released Jewish exiles to return home to Jerusalem in 538 BC for the express purpose of rebuilding the temple (see Ezra 10:1a, below). Following that first wave of returning exiles in 538 BC was a second led by Ezra in 458 BC (7:7, 13). He desired to restore the people to a state of faithful adherence to God’s law (7:25–27). The third and final wave of exiles returned to Jerusalem in 444 BC, led by Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2:1–9; see lesson 7).

Ezra was a scribe of the Law of Moses, commissioned by God (Ezra 7:6). Ezra was made aware that the people of Israel had committed grave sins (chapter 9). The most glaring infraction was that they had intermarried with people groups outside of Israel (Deuteronomy 7:3). This prohibition was not based on any racial or ethnic enmity. Rather, God warned in Deuteronomy 7:4 that foreign faiths “will turn away thy son from following me” (compare 2 Corinthians 6:14–18). Yet even as they returned from exile for sin, men of Judah were marrying pagan women! If these men were divorcing Jewish wives as well, the result was abuse of divorce laws and resulting hardship for the former wives (compare Malachi 2:13–16; Matthew 19:1–9). Ezra’s reaction to the people’s disobedience serves as the subject of today’s lesson.

LESSON COMMENTARY

10:1–4. Ezra continued to pray and intercede for the people who had **gathered to him from Israel** and they **wept bitterly**. This iniquity had apparently gone on for a considerable time since it involved **children** (10:3, 44). However, the people

began to realize that they had not followed God's law and had neglected their identity as a people set apart for God, choosing to live like the foreign nations. **Shecaniah** spoke for the group and declared that they **have been unfaithful to our God**. His solution was **a covenant with our God**. This renewed covenant would require the Judeans to **put away all the foreign wives and their children**. Shecaniah was confident that this act would renew **hope for Israel**. With the use of the group descriptor **Israel**, their covenant identity began to emerge. The community agreed to order their social life **according to the law**. The communal reformation occurred as they renewed the covenant; a similar situation had occurred during the revival at Shechem in Jos 24:2–27. Shecaniah provided support to Ezra and exhorted him to **be courageous and act** (Jos 1:7).

Often the question of whether this episode provides interpretive texture for Paul's instructions in 1Co 7:12–14 arises (Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 165). (1) The narrative here is descriptive and not prescriptive, and one should thus be hesitant to invoke this over Paul's teaching in 1 Co 7 (see the comments on 1Co 7:10–16). (2) The situations in view are too dissimilar; one considers those who had disobeyed God's law by taking foreign wives, while the Corinthian correspondence addresses individuals who began to follow Christ after they had already married. Nevertheless, for followers of Christ who intentionally marry those who are not believers, it would still be inappropriate to follow Ezra's pattern rather than the clear directions of the apostle Paul.

10:5–8. Ezra had the people **take an oath** to follow through with the covenant they had made. **Ezra rose** and withdrew from the people to fast and mourn by himself because of the **unfaithfulness of the exiles**. While Ezra continued to fast and pray, the **leaders and elders** of Israel called **all the exiles** to an assembly in **Jerusalem**. Any who did not come to the gathering would forfeit their property rights and be **excluded from the assembly of the exiles**, i.e., they would lose their identity as a member of the covenant community (Lv 7:21).

10:9–12. The Judeans gathered in the temple **square, trembling** on account of the situation and the **rain**. Ezra began by pointing out that the people **have been unfaithful** to God because they had **married foreign wives**. This section simply restates previously introduced material (9:1–2, 4, 6–7; 10:2). The return from exile had indicated that God had forgiven Israel's sin (Is 40:1–3), but their actions added to the **guilt of Israel**. Ezra called the assembly of the exiles to **make confession** for their sin and then: (1) to withdraw from **the peoples of the land**, and (2) to divorce their **foreign wives**. Upon hearing Ezra's instructions, the returned exiles agreed to the suggested course of action.

LESSON NUGGET – When things look dark, there is always a ray of hope. Shecaniah encouraged the people to confess their sins and obey the Word. He may have been thinking of God's promises in Exodus 34:6-7, Isaiah 55:6-7, and Jeremiah 3:11-13. Believers today turn to 1 John 1:9.

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*