

Ezra's Prayer of Confession and the Call to Repentance

Date: August 23, 2026

Church Name: 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel

References: **Ezra 9-10**, Ezra 7:10; Ezra 9:1; Ezra 9:2; Ezra 9:5; Ezra 9:6; Ezra 9:7; Ezra 9:8; Ezra 9:9; Ezra 9:10; Ezra 9:12; Ezra 9:14-15; Ezra 10:1; Malachi 2:10-16; Joshua 7:1; 2 Corinthians 6:2; Revelation 2-3

So again, thank you to all. Good to see several joining us on Zoom this evening. We're going to be studying in Ezra chapter 9, and we will start at verse number 8—verse number 5, which is really the beginning of his prayer. Unless there are some comments prior to that that we should get before we get into the study of the prayer.

Just a comment on verse 2:

[Ezra 9:2 NKJV] - For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass."

Again, so just to review a little bit regarding Ezra's purpose in coming: to teach the word of God, that was his purpose. It was actually mentioned in the edict of Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, that he should go and teach the law of God. And his purpose was stated earlier in chapter 7:

[Ezra 7:10 NKJV] - For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

So he was prepared and expected that no doubt there was some revival, at least some instruction was necessary when he left Babylon and came to Israel—or to Judah, Jerusalem in particular. But the situation that he found was far, far worse. When those leaders came to him—some of the people, the priests, and the Levites—some of the leaders came themselves and told him that the people had married heathen wives.

The problem there was stated in that verse 2 that we read earlier: "so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands." Now Malachi the prophet wrote about this time, perhaps some years later, and he spoke about this actual fact of the mingling of the seed, the holy seed. Those that were born of promise, that was the holy seed. And there were children there of the race of Abraham that were defiling that covenant that was made.

So in Malachi chapter 2, we read a little bit of a lengthy portion here, if you don't mind, but it bears on the subject of intermarriage with heathen women. It would seem that some of the Jews or the Israelites had divorced their wives and married heathen women.

Now, I was reading what a rabbi had said, and his commentary on that was that when they came back from Babylon, only the poor of the land were there, and the men too. But the women in particular were not very desirable because they had spent long hours in the sun, and their features were darkened, and they were not as beautiful, apparently, to those coming from Babylon. And so some of these heathen wives were very beautiful, and so they divorced their wives and married them. Now, that's what one of the ancient rabbis said as a reason for that. Whether that's true or not, we have no idea. But somehow, we read in Malachi, who prophesied in that time, he says there in verse 10 of chapter 2, Malachi 2:

[Malachi 2:10-16 NKJV] - ¹⁰ Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another By profaning the covenant of the fathers?

And he's referring specifically to the marriage covenant through this section, as we'll see:

¹¹ Judah has dealt treacherously, And an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, For Judah has profaned The LORD's holy institution which He loves: He has married the daughter of a foreign god.

Later on it says He hates divorce, but He loves this. And here in this end of verse 11, it says, "He has married the daughter of a foreign god."

¹² May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob The man who does this, being awake and aware, Yet who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts!

Here, hypocritically, they've sinned in doing this, and yet they still practice their religious rites at the temple. And he says:

¹³ And this is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, With weeping and crying; So He does not regard the offering anymore, Nor receive it with goodwill from your hands.

God won't accept their offering because of their sin. And even though in weeping they plead with the Lord, they're not willing to give up their sin.

¹⁴ Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because the LORD has been witness Between you and the wife of your youth, With whom you have dealt treacherously; Yet she is your companion And your wife by covenant. ¹⁵ But did He not make them one, Having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. ¹⁶ "For the LORD God of Israel says That He hates divorce, For it covers one's garment with violence," Says the LORD of hosts. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, That you do not deal treacherously."

And so he gives them a further warning. Now, we don't know exactly when Malachi wrote this. Most commentators think he wrote it some years after Ezra. If that's the case, then the same sin that they were committing in Ezra's time, in which they repented of, continued later on. Or it may be that the commentators have put Malachi a little bit too late, and actually Malachi's message was current in Ezra's day. But it's that idea that I'm commenting on: the holy seed is mixed.

We'll see later on when they put away their wives that there weren't that many that actually were put away. There were only about 114, which leads us to believe that if the intermarriage was as widespread as it would seem, then many of those heathen wives actually converted to the faith in Jehovah. And there was a long period of inquiry, three months or more, where they went over the problems that each family had, and they were dealt with righteously. And if there was a heathen wife who converted—truly converted, would leave her gods—then she could be included in Israel if there had been a fair practice in the marriage.

So, we'll look a little more in detail later on that, but I just wanted to draw our attention to the fact that God's purpose was to raise up a godly seed from godly families, because the Messiah Himself was going to come out of that little remnant that returned to Jerusalem. From that remnant through Zerubbabel and later others, that would be the messianic line, the line of the Messiah. The godly seed would go through; it would go through that line. And so God wanted to preserve this line.

First of all, I think we see Satan's attack on this, trying to get people to compromise. And we see that God overrules here now through this godly man, Ezra, and his prayer. So having said all that, I think we should just carry on. I'll make a few more comments concerning this prayer in a little while, I guess.

The Posture of Prayer and the Evening Sacrifice

Sure. Well, the prayer begins in verse 5. Excuse me, I've got problems with my voice tonight. The prayer begins in verse 5 and goes down through the end of the chapter. And many have pointed out that this is one of the great prayers of the Bible. Nehemiah had a similar prayer, and Daniel had a similar prayer. And so the three of them are examples of what to pray and how to pray when serious problems arise.

These are serious problems: somebody married the wrong wife, and obviously they did so for reasons that were not good reasons. Eric has suggested one reason; there may be many others. The reason for divorcing the wife and marrying another is not a good reason. It doesn't matter what the reason is—don't do that. That's not God's plan.

So here we go. Excuse me, I'll clear my voice eventually. This prayer begins at the time of the evening sacrifice. I mentioned this morning that many great events in the Bible took place at the time of the morning or the evening sacrifice. And having begun to look for it, I just see it over and over and over again. But God cares about the formalities that He has built into our lives.

Some people say, "I don't really have to go to church. I can do what I want." Other people say, "I don't need Christian fellowship, or I don't need to be there." And we live in an age which is basically a do-your-own-thing age. I can't believe it, but most people who have jobs don't always go to work; they just go sit down at their computer and do whatever they do, and it's a strange age.

God said, "I want you to remember the hour of prayer in the morning and the hour of prayer in the afternoon, the morning sacrifice and the evening sacrifice. That's when the lamps are to be lit; that's when the incense is to be burned." He had a ceremonial order, and the

ceremonial order in the New Testament is very simple. The people did get together for prayer. The people did get together to remember the Lord. The people did get together for baptism. The people did get together for other reasons. And we must say, okay, they had a ceremonial order and God honored it; we should have a ceremonial order and God honored it.

So here goes the next line. It says, "I arose from my heaviness." It's a strange line. He had been in a position of heaviness before the Lord. Now, verse 5 says:

[Ezra 9:5 NKJV] - At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God.

Is that necessary? Sometimes. People say, "My prayer is really important. I am going to..."

There was a great man of God by the name of Robert Chapman, and among other things, his prayer life often included the following: he would go down to the chapel in the middle of the week, and he would kneel in front of the seat where people used to sit. Have you noticed that in the chapel we often sit in the same seat? You look to where we are tonight; most of you are in the same seat you were in last week. And we're people of peculiar habit. I used to get on the bus to go to work every morning at six o'clock; everybody on the bus sat in the same seat. There were only ten of us, but you could tell exactly who was there because we all sat in the same seat—peculiar people. This man Robert Chapman would go to the chapel and he would sit—sorry, he would kneel in front of the chair in which Mr. So-and-so sat, and then the next one, and he would pray for that individual on his knees in front of each of the seats. Was that required? No. Was it a good thing? Yeah. Do you think the Lord honored him? Well, actually, the Lord honored him in many ways. He was a man with more power for God than most of us get near.

So here is Ezra, verse 5: "I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God." Periodically, it's good for us to pray. Sometimes, we used to pray often on a Saturday, and the assembly here would get together. This would be maybe thirty, forty years ago. We'd just get together for a Saturday, and we would often get together at eight o'clock in the morning and we would pray until five o'clock in the afternoon. Was that a good idea? Answer: yes. Do you think anything was accomplished by it? Answer: yes.

What did we do that day? Well, we decided that those of us who could spend the day would not have lunch, so we all skipped lunch who were in the chapel. Others came and went, no

problem, but some of us were there all day, and we had no lunch. And on those occasions, we used to be on our knees most of the day. Now, forty years ago I was substantially younger, and it was easier for me to be on my knees then than it would be now. Did we do the wrong thing by skipping lunch and being on our knees? And the answer is no, I don't think we did. We said, "We need a time of concerted prayer," and we prayed. And the Lord blessed.

How did the Lord bless? Well, actually, that was thirty, forty years ago. The assembly is still going, and several people got baptized today. Do you think maybe those prayers of thirty, forty years ago had anything to do with the fact that some people got baptized today? I often speak to people and I say to them, "How's your assembly doing?" And they say, "Oh, it's good." And then they say, "But we haven't had anyone baptized for..." and then they often say, "for many years."

A Prayer of Confession and Brokenness

So, Ezra, what are you going to do about this? You've got a big problem: the leaders, many of the leaders have gone off and married strange wives. What are you going to do about it? And so Ezra says, "I'm not just going to pray, but I'm going to fall on my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord." And he starts off in verse 6 and says:

[Ezra 9:6 NKJV] - And I said: "O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens.

Have we ever heard of the subject of repentance? Yeah. How does the work of God begin? Repentance. Now, it's all through Scripture: repentance. How did baptism begin? How did baptism begin?

"I am ashamed because our iniquities are increased over our head." What was the consequence of their sin? Verse 7 goes on and says:

[Ezra 9:7 NKJV] - Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as it is this day.

We've been delivered to the sword, we've been delivered to captivity, we've been delivered to spoil, and we've been delivered to confusion of face. All of those are pretty self-explanatory, but I wonder about this little phrase: "confusion of face." Have you ever said, "I don't know what to do next. What's the matter with you?" Well, no. We've been delivered into confusion of face. I don't know how to solve all the problems. Often I open my mouth and then when it's over I say, "I wonder if I said the right thing. Maybe I said the wrong thing." I met a man on the street this afternoon and I think, in retrospect, I should have said something different than what I did say. Hard to know—confusion of face.

There were big problems, and he didn't know what to say, but he did say this: "We deserve what we got because I and my fathers have sinned."

Verse 8:

[Ezra 9:8 NKJV] - And now for a little while grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage.

I like that little line: "for a little while grace has been shown." How had grace been shown? Well, grace had been shown in that the remnant came out of Babylon in the first phase, and now in the second phase. And we're going to read about Nehemiah in the same context. For a little space, the Lord had given them a revival. And you read about it. And when we read about the fact that they came back to Jerusalem, what do we think? Well, frankly, we get excited, and we say, "Lord, thank You. They got to come back."

And then we find sometimes that there are others who come back for this reason or that reason. And I guess there are few things in life that excite me more than to see someone who had wandered away from the Lord come back. In the little space—we don't see a great revival. Revival: what's that word mean? Some of them serve the Lord elsewhere, and some of them don't. But there is a remnant, and by the grace of God, we're part of the remnant. And we say, "Lord, would You continue to keep a remnant?" Ezra says, "It's important, Lord. We need a remnant."

And so he says—where are we? Yes, verse 8 again:

[Ezra 9:8 NKJV] - And now for a little while grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage.

What's a nail? Well, in the simple words, a nail was often used to drive into something and leave it sticking out so you can hang something on it. Right? That's our responsibility as servants of the Lord, isn't it? We should be a nail. And people say, "I don't know what to do; everything's falling apart." And you say, "Hang on, here's a verse of Scripture. You can hang your coat on that, or you can hang your life on that."

And that's why we preach baptism: baptism is a nail that you can hang your life on. You can say, "Lord, I choose to be baptized. Here are the promises that go along with baptism, and they are nails." And so is it important that the Lord give us a nail? Yes. Yeah. And so we go through Scripture and we probably underline the promises we like. We say, "Lord, this is a nail. I'm going to come back to this one. This is really good; I'm coming back."

We need a remnant, and we need a nail to hang on in His holy place that our God may—and here's their prayer—"enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage." You have confusion of face in verse 7; here you have the enlightening of the eyes in verse 8. Well, that's kind of encouraging, isn't it? "I didn't know what to do, but I prayed, and the Lord gave us a nail. And as a result of that, there's a little bit of reviving in our bondage."

How much reviving? Well, I don't think the world was being turned upside down at this point. In the days of Peter and John, in the days of the apostles, the world was being turned upside down, but not here. But there was a little reviving in their bondage.

Verse 9:

[Ezra 9:9 NKJV] - For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem.

Here's his analysis of what happened: we were sinners, and the Lord sent problems to us, but by the grace of God, as a remnant, He gave us a little space. He gave us a little grace. He sent a little reviving. And frankly, we are thankful that He did. And so you can find Ezra

rejoicing in this short history: they came out of Babylon and Persia. Praise the Lord! But there was only a little reviving; for a space of a few years, there was a little reviving, and some of the men of God benefited greatly and rejoiced in it all.

Verse 10:

[Ezra 9:10 NKJV] - And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments,

When was that? Well, that's the problem he's talking about: the marriage. We've forsaken. We did that when? Well, last week and last month and maybe the year before that. Was it everybody? No, not everybody. Was it many? Yes, too many. But he's basically saying, "We had all these punishments, then we had a basic reviving, a little reviving, and now we did it again."

Passing on a Godly Heritage

Someone who isn't clean, someone who is filthy in God's sight, someone who doesn't understand—why would you want to be united to them? And the answer is, if there is any answer, whatever the answer is, it's not a good answer. And Ezra is basically saying, "Listen, here's a problem." And so because of this:

[Ezra 9:12 NKJV] - Now therefore, do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons; and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your children forever.'

Don't marry them! Don't you marry, don't let your sons marry them, don't let your daughters marry them. I guess one of the tragedies of life is it's awfully hard for a father to say to his son or daughter, "You can't marry that person." Thank you.

I know of a story where somebody in the family said, "You can't marry a Philistine. Don't marry a Philistine." What happened? Well, the individual did marry a Philistine. What happened? Well, catastrophe after catastrophe after catastrophe after catastrophe. Is that surprising? No! You can't marry a Philistine. Samson tried that. How did it work? It worked very well. Don't do it!

And so here he is saying, "Don't do it. Don't marry them." And then he goes further, and he says—excuse me—he says in verse 12: "Never seek their peace." It's very strange. Separate yourself from them; don't seek their peace. We would say, ask them to get saved, but don't try to prosper them in their evil.

And then the next line is, "nor seek their prosperity." What would be implied by that? Well, one thing is a lot of people say, "I would like to marry somebody who's bad because they've got a lot of money, and if I marry them, I will get rich." The Shechemites said that to Jacob and his family, didn't they? They said, "If we marry Jacob and his family, then we will take their wealth." That's what the wicked Shechemites said. And Jacob's sons said, "No, we're not going to do that." And so, in a wicked way, they went up and slaughtered the Shechemites. Don't get involved with the Shechemites! What are you doing going down to Shechem anyway, Jacob? You got yourself into real trouble. Why did you go to Egypt anyway, Abraham? You got into real trouble: you married the mother of the Ishmaelite, you married Hagar. Lot, don't go to Sodom! What are you doing in Sodom, Lot? "Well, I'm making a lot of money." That's what Lot said. "It's a great place to go; this land of Sodom, it's like the Garden of Eden. It's so good; I'm making a lot of money." So why would you be warned, "Don't seek their wealth"?

No, it's all very simple: don't do it. If you do it: number one, you will not be strong; number two, you will not eat the good of the land. What happens if you disobey? You won't eat the good of the land. A lot of people do a lot of things for their stomach's sake. It's amazing to me how many people really like what they eat. Frankly, I'm kind of amazed when I watch people eat here at the chapel on Sunday. I think it's because the food's good. A lot of people really like the food here—I'm one of them. Especially, I like the desserts; I'm more a dessert man than I am a main course man. Does the Lord want to say, "Have good food"? Yes. Does the Lord say, "You disobey Me and you won't have good food"? Yes.

We don't know much about wealth and prosperity, but we do know enough that sometimes, as Scripture says, wealth takes wings and flies away. And some of us can say, "I used to be wealthy and I'm not anymore." And then if you ask them, they say—"Which did you prefer: being wealthy or not being wealthy?" And you say, "Well, frankly, I kind of liked it a little better when I had more money in my bank account." Don't do these things.

All right, where does it go after that? Back to the middle of verse 12: "that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever." And I guess it's this line that has got me pondering much recently. Is it important that we leave a godly heritage for our posterity? Yeah. I'm going to be blunt with you: I'm praying that in twenty years' time, 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel will be strong and mighty for God. How's

that going to happen? Well, it's going to happen this way: our children are going to claim as an inheritance the great truths of God that by the grace of God we've been living at 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel for—what's the number? About 130 years. I think that's as far back as we can trace 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel.

What's it going to be 130 years from now? Well, we'll be in heaven. But will the assembly be here if the Lord hasn't come? And the answer is we hope it will be here; the assembly will be here. Will it be a strong inheritance? Well, not if we all end up marrying heathen women, not if we're all seeking their wealth, not if we're running around compromising, trying to bring them peace without repentance.

And Ezra basically is saying, "Lord, I'm looking ahead." He's in the middle of the fifth century BC. Did he know what was going to happen in the days of the Lord Jesus? Well, in part he did; he understood prophecy a little bit. But he's basically saying, "Lord, we've got to make sure that we can pass this inheritance on to our children, and they'll go the wrong way if we're not careful." And so he says the Lord has promised: don't intermarry, don't seek their peace, don't seek their wealth, and you can be strong, you can eat the good of the land, and there will be an inheritance for your children forever.

Okay, you say, "Lord, I like that." You remember the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3: how many of those churches continued to prosper forever? Well, frankly, they all died. None of them are historically in effect today. They all died somewhere along the line—what a tragedy. Now people can go and visit the seven churches of Asia; you can go on a tour, and some Christians will take you on a tour of the seven churches, but they won't say, "This one was thriving 200 years ago, 500 years ago, 700 years ago, all the way back 2,000 years ago." They're not there. They all failed.

All right, so that's a long time for me to talk, and probably we should stop at verse 13 and we'll carry on and finish it off. But maybe I should give someone else a chance to talk and let my voice settle down. So, that's my thoughts on the beginning of the prayer.

Corporate Responsibility and the Unity of God's People

His prayer, Ezra's prayer, is not an intercessory prayer. You know, an intercessory prayer is when you pray on behalf of someone else. Robert Chapman prayed an intercessory prayer for those in the pews. And often we pray for our families, we pray for our friends, we pray for other things. But very seldom do we ever pray like Ezra prayed. That's a different kind of prayer: it's a prayer of confession.

Why would this man of God come and confess? He wasn't part of that. But you see, he recognized one thing: he recognized the unity of the people of God. What affects one person affects all. Just as the body of Christ today, in an even more profound way, what affects one member affects all. You break a finger and your whole body suffers; you get an upset stomach and your whole body suffers; you get a headache and you suffer.

Well, the nation of Israel, the people of God, they were one people. God wanted to keep them pure. That's why the impurities and uncleanness of the nations around them had to do with their idolatry—it was a spiritual uncleanness, not a physical uncleanness, not even a cultural uncleanness. It was a spiritual uncleanness that affected everything in their lives. So that's what God wanted to prevent.

However, the peoples of the lands they joined to, in verse 1:

[Ezra 9:1 NKJV] - When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

That's a big list of different foreign gods that they had joined themselves to. When they married those wives, they were marrying into the people of the land's idolatrous practices. They couldn't separate their wives' religion from their own desires because they married these women.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, probably later on many of those women converted to the worship of Jehovah because there were only 114. And when we come to chapter 10, we find those that had to separate—their names are all there. It's a bad way to get your name in the Bible! But there were only about 114 that they actually divorced, when there were far more, no doubt. So this revival that took place must have affected many of those foreign wives as well.

But at any rate, having said that, why was his prayer one of confession, not intercessory? He didn't say, "They have sinned. Lord, they have taken wives. They have done this." No, he goes right back to the source. Notice this there in verse 7: "Since the days of our fathers..." He goes right back to the source, and he has seen how Israel has never truly separated themselves from the gods of the surrounding nations. They had never truly separated

themselves to God. They were a people that mingled with heathen ideas. They worshiped; they burned incense on the high hills to different gods and so on.

But why, again I ask the question, why this prayer of Ezra? Why would he as an individual pray in such a way that he says, "our iniquities," "our guilt," "we have been very guilty," and so on? And it goes on and on, where he takes the sin of the nation as his own. Well, as I mentioned before, he recognizes the unity of the people of God.

You recall the history when the children of Israel went into the Promised Land and they conquered Jericho. The very first war that they fought, they didn't have to fight it: the walls fell down by themselves. But there was one man there named Achan. He went in and he saw some silver and gold and some beautiful Babylonian garments. Thank you. And he decided—he was overwhelmed by the beauty of this garment and by the prosperity of the silver and gold. Because it was all supposed to be destroyed: Jericho, everything. They were to burn everything. They were to take no captives, they were to take no booty, they were to take nothing from Jericho; it was all burnt up. It was an offering to God Himself. But Achan took some gold, some silver, and beautiful garments, and he hid them in his tent.

Now, as they progressed into the land, the next town that they were going to fight was a little town called Ai. It wasn't that big. But when they tried to take Ai, they were defeated. As a matter of fact, more than 3,000 Israelites were slain in that battle, and they ran from the few people that were in Ai. They couldn't stand before them, and they fell on their faces before the Lord, and they pleaded with the Lord: "Why has this come?" Because there's been a trespass in Israel. And they went by lot, and pretty soon they found this man, Achan. And Joshua said to him, "Confess now. What have you done?" He said, "I saw some gold and silver. I saw this garment, and I lusted for it, and I took it." And all Israel had to suffer.

You read Joshua chapter 7 and verse 1, very plain:

[Joshua 7:1 NKJV] - But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel.

Why did it not burn against just Achan? Why was not just Achan judged of the Lord? Why did the Lord judge all of the nation? Because the nation was one: one people under God. And so Ezra recognizes this one thing: that Achan's sin was the sin of the whole nation. Your sin and my sin affects my brothers and sisters. Amen.

How long has the leaven been working? A long time—2,000 years the leaven has been working. It's affected every one of us in some way: maybe some more, less for others. But we're all in this together. And so I was pondering that, this burden that he had. The reason why it burdened him so much is because he saw his own responsibility and guilt before God, and he was confessing before God. Right from his fathers to him, he saw a progression. Even though he was one of what we call the pure remnant, yet he was affected and he was responsible. So, his prayer of confession.

Unburdening at the Cross

Thank you. But the interesting thing is that he began his prayer—he began to unburden himself—at the evening sacrifice, at the time of the evening sacrifice, which was the exact time when our Lord Jesus was crucified. And there on the cross, He died. It's at the cross where we can unburden ourselves. That's where sin was paid for, right? Sin was dealt with. Sin was finally finished when He cried out, "It is finished!" And as He cried out, "Finished," the smoke of that evening sacrifice of the lamb upon the altar was rising up into the sky above the temple, where He was crucified outside, and His spirit went up. As the smoke went up, His spirit went up as well.

So it's at the cross—that's where we unburden ourselves. It's where we see ourselves with no righteousness; we have no worthiness. We are unworthy; we're unclean, every one of us. But it's at the cross that we can unburden ourselves. And it was there at the time of the evening sacrifice that he began to unburden himself with this great confessional prayer.

And it had an effect. This was a public prayer as well. It had such a powerful effect that others, as we'll see in a little while, others were affected as well. Is that not a good lesson to us? Why are our prayers sometimes ineffective? They're selfish prayers. You know, they're prayers: "I want this, I want that." Why do we want this, and why do we want that? What are the motives for that? Is it for our own selfish desires? Those are the kind of questions we need to ask ourselves when we are praying.

Ezra does say that he does give thanks to the Lord for a partial restoration, a peg or a nail. A nail, or the New King James says a peg. And sometimes, you know, you have a coat hook—they would use a peg in a wall or a nail in the wall to hang something. And they were given a little peg in the land. They were able to hang their hopes on that peg that God had given to them in grace. And so he's thanking the Lord for that, but he sees the danger of what could happen if the people don't repent. If there's no repentance:

[Ezra 9:14-15 NKJV] - ¹⁴ should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor?
¹⁵ O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day. Here we are before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this!"

And he ends his prayer. The position that he took was such that it was like a candle in the wind, almost just a little stub of a candle, a little remnant of light there ready to be blown out by the winds of idolatry from the nation. But his brokenness and his confession had a tremendous effect, as we'll see in this next chapter as we get into it. It broke the people down themselves. Those that knew they were wrong, those that were already trembling at the word, they were greatly encouraged to come in repentance before the Lord. And it couldn't be stopped, this repentance. It was an outburst; it was a true revival.

I was reading not long ago about in 1859 in Scotland, there was a great revival. Yes. And it was a report by a military man, and he wrote about this revival. He said people who were righteous, upstanding people in the community were falling on their knees in the wintertime in the mud and confessing their sins. And he said there were about a million people then who confessed Christ during that great revival in Scotland of 1859. It swept the country, and how many Scottish missionaries went out from that country all over the world in the next fifty years or so? It's incredible what happened. But it came with such brokenness: upstanding people, righteous people in the neighborhood falling down on their knees in the mud. Yes, because it was in the winter, it was raining, and the streets weren't paved. They wept before the Lord, and the Lord did a great, great revival.

And that effect spilled over. Ezra's brokenness spilled over to the other people and it was contagious. And as we'll see, they were eating the bitter fruit of departure from God—bitter fruit. It seems when you repent, it seems like bitterness, but it becomes the sweetest fruit that you can find on this planet after repentance: the peaceable fruit of righteousness. How lovely it is! The fruit of disobedience is bitter, but when confessed, it becomes the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Why are we afraid to repent? Confess! Because we don't want to be exposed, I guess, to who we really are. But Ezra, he took it upon himself to bear, as it were, almost the iniquities of the nation himself as he confessed it to the One who loved him: Jehovah.

The Response of the Assembly

Well, I'm impressed with the prayer, and we've gone on to the point. I can't remember precisely the words I want, but the logic is that if they repented, the Lord would do great things for them.

Verse 9: "For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem." What wonderful things He had done!

And the whole theme is at the end of verse 12: "that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your children forever." That is what could happen if they were to repent, to return to the Lord.

But what happens if they don't repent? The end of verse 14 is a very sobering one. It says, "so that there would be no remnant or survivor." Now, very often we have the attitude that it's true: if we go this way, the Lord will bless; if we go that way, the Lord will condemn. But we don't have to decide today. And here you've got the two opposites: the Lord will bless if they do repent, and if they don't repent, then he's saying there will be no remnant.

That line at the end of verse 14 is very strong: it's possible there should be no remnant or survivor. And so in my Bible, I've written down in my margin across from these words the simple fact: there is still time for escaping.

[2 Corinthians 6:2 NKJV] - For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

There is still time to turn around. And I think Ezra brought himself, and by the grace of God brought the people, to the acknowledgement that this was an issue that had to be dealt with, and it had to be dealt with now.

So this is all preparatory to chapter 10. Frankly, I find chapter 10 one of the most unexpected chapters in the Bible. What happened was that the people agreed with Ezra. The people agreed with Ezra so much that many of them said, "I'm going to get rid of my evil wife, and I'm going to get rid of the children that I brought into the world through my evil wife." And you sit back and you say, "Wow, is that really what the Lord expects today?" And I'm not going to say yes, but that is what the Lord expected then. And Ezra and the people

decided that they were going to do it: they were going to put them away, admitting they never should have married them in the first place, and so they separated from them in the second place.

So that's where we're going to be next week, but let's just look at a verse or two in chapter 10:

[Ezra 10:1 NKJV] - Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly.

Have you noticed all the physical expressions of his repentance? He was weeping. A lot of times we pray and we don't weep. He was weeping! And not only that, but he cast himself down before the house of God. So where was he? Well, on occasion he was standing, and on occasion he was sitting, and then he rose from his—what was that word? He rose from his—my mind—he rose from his heaviness (verse 5). And on this occasion, he's not on his seat, and he's not standing up, and he's not on his knees, but he's flat on his face. Is that a good place to be? Yeah. He was there, all the way down. You can't get much lower than that, frankly. He was on his face, casting himself down before the house of God—not just before the Lord, he did it before the house of God.

Do you think anybody saw him when he was cast down on his face? The answer is yes. And probably when they saw him, they said, "What's wrong with Ezra? Look at Ezra! He's a priest; he's supposed to be... Look at that, he's flat on his face! What's wrong?" And others would notice, and others would notice, and they would begin to say, "What's wrong?" And the answer is, Ezra realizes that something is very, very wrong.

So, verse 1 again:

[Ezra 10:1 NKJV] - Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly.

The spirit of repentance and the spirit of revival spread—amazing! It spread not just to the men; it spread to the women, and it spread to the children.

What could the response be? If the men divorce their wives, well, the women could say, "What's going on here?" Have you ever heard of the women's lib movement? What's happening in the world today? Women have risen to positions of great power. What do they do? They criticize the men who've taken any action. I marvel: there are people who call themselves Christians who believe that the Apostle Paul was a woman-hater. And they will teach that the Apostle Paul, because he didn't get along well with women, he never even married; or if he did marry, his wife was separated from him either by death or something else, but in his ministry he was without a wife. And so they say, "You can't listen to Paul; Paul was a woman-hater." And there's all manner of women out there today who will reject what Paul says on the basis of what he says to women because they say he was a woman-hater.

What did these women do? They came and said, "Those foreign wives shouldn't be." And their children came along with them, and their children said, "I'm glad that my mommy and daddy serve the Lord." I just marvel that this response from the prayer of Ezra was so wonderfully great that the men responded, and the women responded, and the children responded.

How could the children respond? Well, I guess when they went home for supper, mommy and daddy would start talking about this. And when they talked about it, the children would listen to the arguments of mommy and daddy. Do you think it's possible that in our day children learn to be critical of the people of God because mommy and daddy are critical of the people of God? Do you think it's possible in our day that mommy and daddy sitting at the dinner table say things the children pick up on?

I often think of children, and I can imagine children in a home, and all of a sudden there's a big problem. And the children sit up and cross their legs and say, "I'm just going to sit and listen, see how mommy and daddy handle this. This is a big deal. I could learn a lot from my mommy and daddy, how they handle this." And if mommy and daddy handle it right, children end up with respect for the Lord. And if mommy and daddy don't handle it right, and might even go to say, "Now don't talk about this around the chapel; don't say that"—what do the children learn?

These children learned that there was a huge problem. Their inheritance was at stake, and the children assembled along with the mommies and daddies around Ezra.

Well, that's verse 1, and we'll start there again next week. Our time is more than gone. I usually don't end up giving Eric much time, but Eric, we're going to start in chapter 10—we'll start in verse 1 again.

So okay, would someone please close in prayer and thank the Lord for His goodness to us? Thank the Lord that there is still time to escape; there's still hope for a remnant. Hallelujah, by the grace of God we want to be part of that remnant.

Closing Prayer:

Our Heavenly Father, we thank You for the book of Ezra, Lord, and all the lessons we learn from him. Thank You, Lord, that he was a man who stood up for what was right. And he took most of the blame on himself, Lord, as we should most of the time too when we see things going on and we don't complain about it or make any response to it. Lord, thank You for all that we learned. Lord, help us to straighten out our lives before You and improve the condition of our people, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen.