

From Babylon to Jerusalem - (Ezra) ch.7 - ch.10

by Zac Poonen

Ezra, a Bible teacher and scribe, was commissioned by the king to lead a new generation of people out of Babylon and to restore the temple.

Duration: 1:00:37

Scripture: Ezra 7:6, Ezra 8:21

Topics: "From Babylon To Jerusalem", "Commitment to God's Word", "Leadership"

Description

Zac Poonen explores the transition of Ezra and the people from Babylon to Jerusalem, emphasizing the significance of Ezra's leadership and his commitment to God's Word. He highlights how Ezra, a skilled scribe and priest, was raised up by God to lead a new generation that chose to leave the comforts of Babylon for the challenges of Jerusalem. Poonen underscores the importance of wholeheartedness in ministry, the necessity of prayer and fasting, and the need for accountability in handling God's resources. He also addresses the dangers of compromise and the importance of maintaining purity in relationships, particularly in marriage. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a radical commitment to God's standards and the building of His house.

Transcript

The book of Ezra, and we have been looking at the first six chapters, and if you have been following carefully, you would have noticed that the name of Ezra has not yet appeared in these six chapters. Ezra was the man who wrote this book, but his own name never appears in the first six chapters. But when it comes to chapter seven, where we are going to turn today, chapter seven, verse one, we find Ezra's name coming here.

In the reign of Artaxerxes, and I mentioned last time that Artaxerxes is just a royal title, like Pharaoh. Many kings of Persia had that title. There went up Ezra, son of Sariah, son of Ezraiah, son of Hilkiah, and this is after a gap of about sixty years, after the temple was completed, the gap of sixty years between chapter six and chapter seven, and it is during that period that the events described in the book of Esther occur, and it's good for us to bear that in mind.

The book of Esther occurs, all those things written there, between chapter six and chapter seven of the book of Ezra. And we know that Esther was a Jew, a God-fearing Jew, and was married to the Artaxerxes

of Persia, the king of Persia. So the Artaxerxes that we read of in chapter seven, verse one, is no doubt one of her descendants.

And that's why you find a significant change in the attitude of the king towards Ezra and the other people going back to Jerusalem. It's tremendous to see the wholeheartedness of this king. It's amazing how God can work in sovereign ways, even allowing a Jewish girl to marry the king.

We can't say that was in the will of God, because it was not the perfect will of God for his people ever to marry foreigners. But when it did take place, then God used it for his sovereign purpose. And so we see here in chapter seven, verse one, about Ezra.

And he was of the priestly tribe, descended from Aaron. And he's described here as, in verse six, he went up from Babylon. And he was a scribe, skilled in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given.

You see, the generation of Haggai, and Zechariah, and Zerubbabel, and Joshua had passed away. And when one generation passes away, God raises up another generation. And when one generation of leadership passes away in the church of God, God raises up another level of leadership in the church of God.

And Ezra, when he was a little boy, must have heard about the work that Haggai and Zechariah had done in prophesying to build the temple of God. He must have been stirred in his heart. And from that time, he must have devoted himself to the study of the word.

So that when he grew up, God could use him to take a second batch of people out of Babylon into Jerusalem. This was a new generation that had grown up in Babylon. Their parents had not left Babylon.

They had sought the comforts of Babylon and not moved to Jerusalem. But the children who grew up decided that they were moving to Jerusalem. And we see that even today, where sometimes there are parents who want to stay in the Babylonian systems, but the children who grow up want to move out.

And Ezra was, we could say, the young people's leader of this group of people who wanted to move out of Babylon into Jerusalem. And though his age is not given, in many places in the Old Testament, we see God raising up people to places of ministry at the age of thirty. Joseph, David, Ezekiel.

Presumably, Ezra was around the same age as I just mentioned. Just want to emphasize again, the youth of the leadership that God raised up to move his people out of Babylon into Jerusalem. A word of encouragement to people today, young people today, to be wholehearted.

This Ezra went up from Babylon. That's a word that's used six times in Ezra. Went up.

Babylon is down. Jerusalem is up. Went up from Babylon and he was a scribe.

A ready scribe, it says in another translation, like Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2.15. Be diligent to present yourself to God. A workman who does not need to be ashamed. Rightly dividing the word of truth.

And Ezra was a Bible teacher. He was not a prophet. The word scribe means Bible teacher.

Now in the days of Jesus, these scribes had degenerated so much that they had become like the Pharisees. And it's easy for Bible teachers to degenerate and become Pharisees, just like it's easy for false prophets to arrive. But Ezra was a wholehearted Bible teacher.

Just like Haggai and Zechariah were prophets. And we see this, that in the restoration to Babylon, from Babylon to Jerusalem, the ministries that God used were primarily the ministries of the prophets and the Bible teachers. Prophets in Haggai and Zechariah, the Bible teacher in Ezra.

And gifts of administration that we find in Zerubbabel, Joshua, and also Nehemiah. And we see another thing, that God raised these people up in pairs. We saw that Haggai and Zechariah were together at the same time.

Zerubbabel and Joshua worked together. One was from the kingly line, and the other from the priestly line. And Ezra and Nehemiah worked together.

The book of Nehemiah runs parallel with this part of the book of Ezra. There was this dual ministry going on all the time in God's work of restoration from Babylon to Jerusalem. So here was a Bible teacher.

Prophets and teachers, just like we read in the church in Antioch in Acts 13 verse 1, that there were prophets and teachers in the church in Antioch. And it's my own firm conviction that the most important requirement for building the body of Christ in any place is that a local church has prophets and teachers. Without prophets and teachers, it is not possible to build Jerusalem, the body of Christ.

And so that we see very clearly in the book of Ezra. And he was a scribe who had studied, but not only had he studied, it says here that in the last part of verse 6, the hand of the Lord his God was upon him. There are two things necessary in order to be a good Bible teacher.

One is to be skilled, first part of verse 6, in the word of God through careful study of the word. And the other is that the Lord must have laid his hand on that person's head and anointed him. The hand of the Lord was upon him means he was anointed.

Two very important requirements. I just say this to young people whom God may be raising up to teach the word. Be skilled in the word that does not come by laziness, but through diligence.

And seek continuously for the anointing of the Holy Spirit. That's what happened, that was the lack in the scribes in Jesus' day. They did not seek for the anointing of the Spirit and so they missed out on the light that the Spirit could have given.

And it says here, the king granted him all that he requested because he had the anointing on him. God works sovereignly on behalf of those who are anointed. And some of the sons of Israel and some of the priests, the Levites, singers, gatekeepers in the temple went up to Jerusalem.

There was a second batch of people who took a stand against their parents. The parents were not interested in moving to Jerusalem, but the younger generation decided they were quitting Babylon. Praise God for young people like that and praise God for Enezra who was available to lead them out.

And he came to Jerusalem the fifth month, which is in the seventh year of the king. And the first of the fifth month he began to go up from Babylon, the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem. Because the good hand of his God was upon him.

That's a very beautiful phrase. It is the good hand of God that takes us out of Babylon. We saw that in verse 6, we see it again in verse 28, three times in this chapter.

The good hand of God. It's a phrase that Ezra loves to use concerning himself. And we must remember that it is the good hand of God that takes us out of Babylonian systems and brings us to the truth.

And here's a very beautiful verse that describes Ezra's attitude to God's word. Ezra had set his heart, notice that, not his head. It doesn't say he studied with his head.

He set his heart to study the word of God. It's one thing to study the word of God with our heads, and that's what they do in Bible schools. But Ezra didn't go to any rotten Bible school.

He set his heart to study the word of God. And the good hand of God was upon him, teaching him the word. And that's what we need these days.

He set his heart to study, number one, to obey it, number two, and then to teach it to others, number three. Beautiful verse. One of the finest verses in the entire Bible for all who will be involved in the ministry of the word of God.

First of all, set your heart. Second, be diligent to study it wholeheartedly, obey it, and then teach it, like Jesus. Acts 1 verse 1. He did, and then he taught.

Ezra also did the same thing. He did, and then he taught. He didn't teach what he didn't do.

He studied it, obeyed it in his life, and then taught it. And his heart was set on studying the word. And when we study the word like that, with our hearts set on it, with the good hand of God upon us, and obey it, then we will find that our ministry of teaching the word to others, and sharing the word with others, will bring profit.

There's a very beautiful verse in Ecclesiastes chapter 12 verse 10, which is paraphrased in the Living Bible like this. Ecclesiastes 12 10 in the Living Bible reads like this. The preacher was not only a wise man, but a good teacher.

He was a wise man first. He had wisdom, and he was a good teacher. He not only taught what he knew to the people, but he taught them in an interesting manner.

Ecclesiastes 12 10 is a word that all who preach the word of God should take to heart. They should be wise, and they should teach it, not in a boring manner, but in an interesting manner. Well Ezra was like that, and we read further in verse 11.

This was a copy of the decree which King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe. Learn it in the words of the commandments of the Lord and his statutes to Israel. Artaxerxes, king of kings, look at the title he takes to himself, to Ezra the priest, the scribe, the law of the God of heaven.

Quite a contrast in these two titles, but we know in God's eyes who was greater, perfect peace. And now I have issued a decree that any of the people of Israel and their priests and the Levites in my kingdom who are willing to go to Jerusalem may go with you. Here was a man raised up just like Cyrus, who was raised up for that generation.

Here God raises up another king to say, all right, now another generation of people who would like to move out to Jerusalem, those who want to go against the decision of their parents who wanted to stay on in Babylon, who want to move out to Jerusalem, you are free to go. And to Ezra the king, you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah, according to the law of your God, to bring

silver and gold. The king and his counselors have freely offered it to the God of Israel.

With all the silver and gold which you shall find in the whole province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and the priests who offered willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem, with this money therefore you shall diligently buy bulls and rams and their grain offerings and their libations and offer them on the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. And whatever seems good to you and to your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do according to the will of your God. Also the utensils which are given to you for the service of the house of your God deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem.

It's amazing that this king had confidence in a servant of God to hand him all this money and to say to him, verse 18, whatever seems good to you, you may do according to the will of your God. It's very rare to find a servant of God to whom money can be entrusted and freedom given, say, do what you like. And there we see the remarkable faithfulness that Ezra must have had, even as a young man and if he was around 30 years of age, you can imagine what a testimony he had acquired by that time in the use of money, that he was not like those Babylonian preachers.

Ezra could have been a Bible teacher in Babylon, there were many Jews in Babylon who needed Bible teaching, but it's one thing to be a Bible teacher in Babylon and it's quite another thing to be a Bible teacher in Jerusalem. And if Ezra had decided to stay and live the comfortable life and be a Bible teacher in Babylon, we would never have heard of him. There would never have been a book in the Bible called the book of Ezra.

He suffered, the Bible teachers in Babylon enjoyed themselves, the Bible teacher like Ezra who came out of Jerusalem suffered. He doesn't mention anything about his suffering in the book, but that's quite to be expected. He wouldn't talk about such things, but we know in eternity what a reward will be his.

But the confidence that even the king could have to entrust all this money and silver and gold and say, I have total confidence in you that you will use it according to the will of God. It's very important, brothers and sisters, if we want to restore Jerusalem, that we are absolutely righteous and faithful in the use of money. That we earn a testimony in that area before others.

Money is a very important thing, an important area in which we need faithfulness in this movement from Babylon to Jerusalem. We see here also the utensils are given for the service of the house of your God and the rest of the needs for the house of your God, which you have occasion to provide, provided from the royal treasury. And I, King Artaxerxes, issue a decree to all the treasurers that whatever Ezra the priest may require of you shall be done diligently, up to a hundred talents of silver, a hundred cores of wheat, a hundred bobs of wine, a hundred bobs of oil and salt as needed.

And whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done with zeal for the house of the God of heaven. You can see that he has some understanding, no doubt come from Esther, who was probably his mother or grandmother or something. The light that came into that palace there, and he's seen, though he himself doesn't say this is my God, he's not converted, but he's willing to help.

He says, lest I be wroth against the kingdom of the king and his sons. It's an amazing thing, whatever is commanded that the king says in exhortation that all of us could take seriously. Verse 23, whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done with zeal for the house of God.

A good exhortation. And we also inform you that you're not allowed to impose any tax or tribute or toll on any of the priests, Levites, singers, doorkeepers, nephenims or servants of this house of God. This is what I meant, how wholehearted this king was, even though he himself was not converted.

It's amazing how God can work sovereignly in the hearts of kings to fulfill his purpose. And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God, which is in your hand, appoint magistrates, judges, that they may judge all the people who are in the province. And even all those who know the laws of your God, you may teach anyone who is ignorant of them.

And whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him strictly, whether for death, or for banishment, or for confiscation of goods or imprisonment. You know, he didn't have much light there on what to do with people who disobeyed the word. This was the heathen attitude.

If he didn't obey the word of God, well, finish him off, just kill him, get rid of him. It's a mixture. But anyway, God used him for the furtherance of his purposes.

And Ezra writes, when he gets this letter, he doesn't thank the king first of all. It's wonderful. It's the attitude of a true servant of God.

He said, blessed be the Lord. Think how good God is. The God of our fathers who put such a thought into the heart of this king.

I wonder if we adopt that attitude when we go to a government office, or you go somewhere and you need something done, and someone does something that is favorable to you, that we give the glory to God. Blessed be the Lord who put that thought into that man's heart to help his child, to help the child of God. Well, that's what Ezra did, and that's a good example to follow.

And he says, God has extended mercy to me. That's a mercy. He doesn't think he deserves it.

He's got no high opinions about himself at all. He's got such a small opinion about himself. It's just God's mercy shown to me before the king, and before all the king's mighty princes.

And thus, I was strengthened, not because I diligently studied the word, but because God's good hand was upon me. And I was able to gather leading men from Israel to go up with me. Again, that word, to go up with me.

And now we find a second list here in chapter 8, a list of another generation of people who have grown up and who have decided to leave Babylon, contrary to the decision of their parents. These are the heads of their father's households, and the genealogical enrollment of those who went up with me from Babylon in the reign of King Artaxerxes. And it's very good to see this.

Not a very big list this time. There were 42,000 or so the previous time, and this time it's a much, much smaller number of the sons of Phinehas, so and so, and down the line all the way down to verse 14. And we must bear in mind that these were people who came in about 80 years, it took 20 years before the temple was completed after the first batch came, another 60 years, 80 years after the first movement to Babylon.

This is really two generations later. They could look back to grandfathers, who when the choice came, do you want to go to Babylon or Jerusalem, said, we'll stay in Babylon. And their fathers also said, we'll stay in Babylon.

But when it came to their generation, they said they're going. They took a stand against the decision of their grandfathers and their fathers, and moved out of Babylon, partly I think because God could find a man called Ezra to lead them out. God's always dependent on people.

God's looking for a Daniel, a Haggai and Zechariah, and Ezra and Nehemiah even today, to lead out a new generation of people out of Babylon. And God's got an exact list of the people who leave. And we read here, verse 15, I assembled all these people at the river that runs to Ahabba, where we camped for three days.

They were getting ready to move out of Babylon to Jerusalem. And when I observed the people in the priest, I did not find any Levites there. That's interesting.

You see in the first batch also, there were just very few of these full-time workers who moved out of Babylon to Jerusalem. And during the 80 years that went by, news must have come back about how these full-time workers in Jerusalem were struggling, and all the rich people were in Babylon. And so in this batch, nobody wants to go.

They want to serve the Lord in Babylon. There's a need here brother, and we have to help the people here. And no Levites at all.

They've got news from their other people there that's pretty tough going here, and they didn't want all that. Well, Ezra knew that we can't conduct the services in the temple without the Levites. Nobody else can do that.

So he sent for Eliezer and various leaders, teachers. And then verse 17, I sent them to Iddo, the leading man of the place, and I told them what to say, and told them that you've got to bring some ministers to us for the house of our God. And according to the good hand of our God upon us, they brought us a man of insight of the sons of Malchi, the son of Levi.

Somehow they managed to convince one man and a few people there. It says about 18 people finally got convinced. I don't know how they got convinced.

Maybe with some offer of some money or something. But 18 men decided to come. They didn't come.

They knew there were people going out from Babylon to Jerusalem. They didn't come. But finally, with some reason or the other, they decided to come.

And then Hashabiah and Jeshiah with his brothers, another 20, and 220 temple servants, whom David had given for the service of the Levites. Verse 21, we read here, then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava. It's very interesting to see in the movement from Babylon to Jerusalem, the books that deal with it, the important place that fasting has.

Daniel fasted and prayed. And Ezra fasted and prayed. Nehemiah fasted and prayed.

That speaks of a wholeheartedness in seeking God for this movement from Babylon to Jerusalem. And he says we had to humble ourselves. In the way by which they expressed towards God the humbling of their

soul.

David says, I humbled my soul by fasting. And he says we fasted to humble ourselves before God, to seek from him a safe journey for us out of Babylon into Jerusalem. Lord, save us from these halfway homes that lie between Babylon and Jerusalem.

You know there are halfway homes where people are fed up of Babylon, but Jerusalem is too wholehearted. But there are these stopping places in between. And Ezra said that's the thing I fear.

To get out of Babylon and then get stuck in some halfway place between Babylon and Jerusalem would be terrible. That happened to Abraham when he left Ur of the that he got stuck in a place called Haran. He didn't go to Canaan.

He got stuck halfway. That is the first halfway home mentioned in the Bible. Then God had to take away his father in debt because his father was a stumbling block there.

Abraham's father died and then Abraham got moving. Sometimes God has to do some drastic things when a man is so attached to his father that he gets stuck in some halfway home. God will remove the father so that he can get his servant going to where he should be as a servant of God.

And we see here he prayed, Lord give us a safe journey that we can move out from Babylon all the way. And our little ones Lord. We don't want to leave our little ones behind in Babylon.

We want our little ones and our possessions. We don't want to give any of our money for Babylon. That's another thing we must bear in mind.

Just like we've got a burden for ourselves. We must have a burden that our little ones come out of Babylon too as they grow up. And our money and our possessions that none of it goes for the building up of Babylon.

All of it goes for the building up of Jerusalem. And they fasted and prayed for that. He was not fasting and praying for some healing or promotion or a job or anything like that.

He was concerned about God's name, fasting and praying for the glory of God. That's very important. And then verse 22, it says here the reason why he fasted and prayed and asked God's protection was he didn't want to ask the king for troops.

The king could have sent an army to protect him. But he says I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way. There are enemies on the way.

That teaches us that there are these robbers and thugs and bandits on the way from Babylon to Jerusalem who'd like to stop you or hinder you. Prevent you from moving out to the place where God wants you to be. Ezra knew that.

It's good that we know it too. That on the route from Babylon to Jerusalem there are bandits along the way who would like to steal your tights or something and keep you stuck where you are. But he said I'm not going to ask the king for troops and horsemen because we had already testified to the king the hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek him but his power and his anger are against all those who forsake him.

And he said after I'd given such a fantastic testimony before the king and then I go and ask him now can you please give us some troops to protect us from the enemy. That would be such a bad testimony. He was so concerned.

His faith had works. His faith had works. He knew there were enemies but if he goes to the king and asks for troops the king would say hey you're the fellow who said that God protects those who are wholehearted and all and now you want my troops to protect you.

What's this? He was ashamed of that. Wonderful. To have a faith where Lord let the heathen know that I trust you.

That you can help me more than all these heathen people. Their influence and their money and their troops can't help me as much as you almighty God can help me. God needs people of a living faith if he are to build Jerusalem.

People of a living faith alone can build Jerusalem. And so he says we fasted. His faith had works.

He knew what Jeremiah the prophet had said. Cursed is he who leans upon the arm of flesh and blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord. There was no laziness in Ezra's faith.

He did what Jeremiah said to not lean on the arm of flesh. Jeremiah 17 7 and he trusted in the Lord but he fasted. There was an exercise of his faith.

He fasted and sought our God concerning this matter and God listened to our entreaty and we see here in verse 24 then I set apart just one more thing before I move on to this and that is that it's not enough to reach Jerusalem. We can say the goal is Jerusalem but the way we reach there is also important. The means are as important as the ends.

The way I build God's house must be by faith. My movement must be movement of faith. So we see here that I set up Mark 12 of the leading priests besides Jeremiah and He weighed out all the silver and gold the utensils for the house of our God to them and there we see another aspect of Ezra's wisdom that he didn't even though the king said you can keep all the money and handle it yourself he was very wise.

He said I won't keep the money myself. He called various 12 priests and with 10 of their brothers and he weighed out exactly. He didn't just say listen I'm sure you fellas can trust me in this matter we're all brothers this is how much there is.

No he counted it out and that teaches us that every servant of God has to be very careful in handling money. We read in 2nd Corinthians chapter 8 there's an amazing verse 2nd Corinthians 8 where Paul says about the collection of funds for the poor saints in Jerusalem. He says in 2nd Corinthians 8 21 we have regard for what is honorable not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men and that's why Paul did not handle that money himself.

You read 2nd Corinthians 8 he sent two other brothers always two at least two if not more never one person alone must handle funds if we are to build Jerusalem. It's amazing how these principles of money come in in this Old Testament book that Ezra got these people and weighed out the gold and silver and said and take care of this you brothers be the treasurers of this. It's very important to have this wisdom in the handling of money and it's far better that those who are called to the ministry of the word like Ezra don't handle it themselves but and hand over that responsibility to other brothers who can do that.

We see here in verse 26 and 27 a list of the items that were weighed out then I said to them you're holy the utensils are holy these people who are handling the money also got to be wholehearted brothers and faithful and these are an offering watch and keep them verse 29 until you weigh them before the leading priests you've got to give an account for it finally when you reach the other end when you reach Jerusalem all this has got to be exactly you shouldn't have touched any of it it's a very good exhortation concerning the handling of money in God's house and that also teaches us that finally when we stand before the Lord in the final day we've got to give an account for all the money that we started out our spiritual pilgrimage with.

God weighed it out and gave it to us so much every month which we call our salary but God's weighed it out and given it to us and one day we stand before the Lord God's going to weigh it again and see whether I used it all for the glory of God that's just a truth we can learn from there there's a deposit that God has given us which is going to be weighed again at the end just like the faith which he's committed to us he's going to see whether we are faithful in the same way in the area of money and so the priest accepted the weighed out silver we praise God for brothers who are willing to take responsibility you know they didn't say oh well there's too much of responsibility some bandit comes and steals something from me I'll be in the soup when I get in the other end no there are a lot

of brothers believers who are unwilling to take responsibility because it's too inconvenient for them but praise God for these people here who took the responsibility yeah we'll take care of that that's a risky business but we're willing to do it for the house of our God's sake they're willing to take their responsibility in handling the money and other responsibilities to bring them to then we journeyed from the river to the 12th the first month to go to Jerusalem the hand of our God was over us there again that beautiful phrase and he delivered us from all these bandits along the way praise God for those of us whom God has also delivered from the bandits along the way and the ambushes there are ambushes secret plans that people make along the way to prevent people from reaching

Jerusalem it's amazing how much the devil is interested in hindering even that new generation of young people from reaching Jerusalem bandits and ambushes and all types of things the devil's got lined up but finally by the good hand of God upon us we came to Jerusalem what beautiful words we came not to some halfway home but to Jerusalem to the church of the living God and remain there and then the silver and gold utensils were weighed out and everything was numbered verse 34 weighed and all the weight was recorded and the exiles who had come from the captivity offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel not just for the two tribes who went to captivity in Babylon but for the other 10 tribes who had gone earlier to captivity to Assyria I mentioned this last time that Israel went out as

captives in two batches one to Assyria one to Babylonia Babylon but they came back as one that's how it is in Jerusalem the different groups become one 12 bulls for all Israel they were no longer two nations they were one and never again would Israel be divided like they were in the days of Rehoboam into two countries a beautiful picture of the body of Christ and then they delivered the king's to the king's satraps and to the governors and they supported the people in the house of God when these things were completed now they've come back the temple was already built as you know about 60 years ago these people came back and I think life was a little more comfortable now in Jerusalem than it was for the first batch the pioneers always have the toughest time the people who come in a little

later have it a little easier but when you have it a little easier there is a danger of compromise as well you know I often think of the children who are born in our midst they have not had to have the this fight this

battle against the harlot system that some of us have had to fight in our time and therefore there's something they can miss if they're not wholehearted and that's what we see here they came the princes approached me saying well there's a bit of compromise going on among these groups that have come out of Babylon now they've come out of Babylon but Babylon has not come out of them completely just like people came out of Egypt but Egypt hadn't come out of them here we find the same thing that they came out of Babylon physically but the spirit of Babylon was there it's easy

also brothers and sisters for that to happen in our day where people can come out of a system and think I have left Babylon I am now in a new testament church but what is the spirit there that's the question and that's what God speaks of here the people of Israel and the priests have not separated themselves from the people of the land they have come physically to Jerusalem they have left that dead denomination and come join the body of Christ in its local gathering on earth but their lives at home are just like anybody else's they're shouting at their wives just like those Babylonians they're unfaithful in money matters like those Babylonians they keep income tax like the Babylonians and they do a lot of rotten things like the Babylonians but they're sitting in a so-called new testament

church they have not separated themselves from these abominations of all these heathen people and one more thing worse too they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves they got intermarried to people who are not wholehearted I tell you with young people the test comes when it comes to marriage I often say that yeah we can say a brother is wholehearted but just wait till the time comes for his marriage and see how he approaches that then we'll see how wholehearted he really is then he's concerned about whether she's good-looking and whether she's got this she's a graduate and whether this that and the other all right you can have that but you're going to end up in the same old compromise that all those other people out there in Babylon are and that's what happened here

the holy race has intermingled with the people of the land indeed the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness think of that failure in the leadership it's terrible when there's failure in the leadership not at the not at the level of Ezra and Nehemiah no there was no failure there but there was a failure in the second level of leadership among the princes Ezra and Nehemiah were wholehearted but in the second level of leadership there was a lack of wholeheartedness in marriage matters yeah that's very interesting to see how these things can happen today because we leave all these systems and when it comes to marriage you say what to do and adopt Babylonian principles again it's so true to our time but one good thing we see is that the princes came to

Ezra they didn't go backbiting about it to each other that's a good example to follow there that when there is a problem like this the best thing to do is to go to the one who has responsibility and spiritual authority in that place and to put the matter before such a brother or such brothers that was a good thing they did because they did that Ezra could solve that problem if they had tried to handle it themselves well or if they'd just gone around backbiting it had just made a mess of things wonderful principles about building God's house in this book and so he says when I heard this matter here is the spirit of a true elder brother I tore my garments and my robe and pulled some of the hair from my head my beard and sat down appalled grief oh lord after leaving all this wretched system

don't tell me that we have come here and now started behaving like the Babylonians all over again you know when there was carnality in Corinth Paul wrote to the Corinthians and said this in 2nd Corinthians 12 21 he said when I come to your midst I'm afraid that God may humble me and I may mourn over many who have sinned in the past and not repented of their impurity and immorality and sensuality which they

have practiced why should Paul be humbled if other people in Corinth have failed because they were his children he said God humbles me when I see the failure among the people who are the result of my labors he doesn't just stand up and say you bunch of hypocrites he says that's a reflection on me I lord I just want to humble myself and this terrible state of affairs compromise in the

groups that call themselves separated God had very clearly said through Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 7 verse 3 that you must never marry the heathen a Jew must only marry a Jew in the new testament be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers don't give your daughters to nominal Christians don't give your sons to nominal Christians far better they remain single than get married to an unbeliever well they disobeyed it and God's servant was concerned and he humbled himself and he cried out to God and then verse 4 those who trembled at the words of God on account of the unfaithful and the exiles gathered to me and around Ezra were gathered together a few people like it says in Isaiah 66 verse 2 I will look at the man who trembles at my word here were a few people who trembled at God's

word and they came together with Ezra and at the time of the evening offering you know when the evening offering is there were two offerings in Israel one was in the morning at around nine o'clock the other in the evening at three o'clock two offerings in the day that's why Jesus died on the cross hung on the cross from nine o'clock in the morning till three o'clock in the afternoon and that was the time three o'clock in the afternoon when Jesus died on the cross later on at that time the evening offering that Ezra rises up with the true spirit of Christ who died was going to die on the cross more than about 500 years later what spirit is that the spirit that takes upon oneself the sins of other people Jesus Christ could take upon himself the punishment but Ezra could not take the

punishment but he could take the burden of the sins of other people we cannot take the punishment of the sins of other people but we can take the burden of the sins of other people in the fellowship that's what it says in 1 John chapter 5 towards the end of that chapter one of the last verses there it says if anyone sees a brother sin a sin not unto death what should he do he should take that burden upon himself and pray if he's carnal let him go and backbite but if he's a spiritual brother let him take that burden on himself and pray let him share it with the elder brother and pray that's what they did these four-hearted people took that burden on themselves at the time of the evening offering at three o'clock in the afternoon and I arose from my humiliation with my garment my rope torn

I fell on my knees stretched out my hands to the Lord and said oh my God I'm ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to thee my God for our iniquities have risen our heads our guilt has grown even to the heavens what had Ezra done he hadn't married a heathen he hadn't done anything wrong why was he embarrassed that's the spirit of Christ Lord my brothers have let you down may God raise up many with that spirit in our midst and since the days of our fathers we have been in guilt notice the word we our he doesn't say these fellows or these humbugs but we Lord we failed it's Lord it's our assembly that needs to be more wholehearted we've slipped up here here's what's happening among some of the brothers here's what's happening among some of the sisters Lord I'm concerned about it I want

to just stand there and say I'm a whole hearted person these are all just claiming to be like that it brings a bad name to God Ezra was concerned about it and I believe that the Lord is looking for those who have a burden for his name who pray hallowed be thy name not Lord look at me a wholehearted brother that can be the spirit of the Pharisee Lord look at me I'm not like these some of these other brothers and sisters in the assembly I don't do this that and the other but Lord hallowed be your name and your name is dishonored by some of the things these people do but now he says for a brief moment grace has been

shown to us to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in his holy place that's referring to the temple that's being built a place of security that our God may enlighten

our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage for we are slaves yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us has extended loving kindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia and given us this reviving and now our God what shall we say after this we have forsaken thy commandments which thou has commanded you told us very clearly that we were not to partake of the abominations of these people verse 12 we are not to give our daughters to their sons or take their daughters to our sons never seek the peace of their peace of prosperity and after all this verse 13 that has come upon us for our evil deeds thou has given us less than we deserve of punishment and I just want to mention that in passing that that is the true spirit of repentance verse 13 all this has come upon us for

our evil deeds and our great guilt and thou has punished us less than we deserve Lord I deserve hell but you've given me less than I deserve if we don't have that spirit we haven't repented yet nobody has repented who doesn't honestly say to God Lord I deserve hell but you haven't given me what I deserve and that spirit you may be converted 25 years I've been a Christian now for 25 years and I say Lord I deserve hell but you haven't given me what I deserve I don't believe that spirit can ever leave us I pause it on the chief of sinners in other words I deserve the bottom place in hell the hottest fires of hell but God hasn't given me that may God preserve us in that spirit to build Jerusalem Lord shall we break your commandments again after all that you have forgiven us all the multitudes

of sins that you forgive us in the days when we didn't have light now we've got light we claim to be wholehearted we claim to be in Jerusalem we claim to have left Babylon and now we're still backbiting still having bitteresses still defeated still lusting Lord have mercy on us good prayer to pray no complaints against God only thankfulness for his mercy oh Lord you are righteous we are just a remnant we are before you in our guilt no one can stand before you because of this because he took that position God could use him a man was not just a dry old Bible teacher a scholar in the word an anointed man but who had a burden for God's name that's what God's looking for a man like Ezra and in the movement from Babylon to Jerusalem there are three important chapters of prayer one is Daniel

chapter 9 the other is Ezra chapter 9 and the third is Nehemiah chapter 9 all three chapters deal with prayer and in all three chapters you find the people praying we have sinned even though the people who pray were wholehearted they took that blame on themselves the Spirit of Christ so that they didn't blame others they didn't blame God they were thankful for God's mercy and that saved them from Pharisee and if the scribes have remained like that right down from Ezra's time to Jesus time they would not have become Pharisees the scribes became Pharisees in Jesus time because they did not have the spirit of this scribe Ezra the spirit of humbling themselves and judging themselves and not judging others but with an awareness of God's holiness that God's standards are right Lord you're

righteous and we are guilty you deserve to punish us you deserve to send us all the way back to Babylon all over again it's only where there is an awareness of God's holiness and his standards that we can ever expect Jerusalem to be built and then chapter 10 here is the answer to prayer so quickly and God finds a man like this who prays you can find the answer to prayer coming to while Ezra was praying and making confession weeping don't be ashamed to weep men of God men of God we men of God humbled themselves they're not weeping for themselves they're weeping for others like Jesus here's the answer a large assembly men women and children gathered to them for the people wept bitterly and then Shekinah the son of Jahiel one of the sons of Elam said to Ezra we've been unfaithful here's a

man who had not himself married a heathen wife notice this he had not married a heathen wife but he also uses the word we how do we know he's not married a heathen wife because the list of those who married a heathen wife is given later on in the chapter and his name is not there but he says we've been unfaithful we have married foreign women another man with the same spirit amazing where God can find one man in the spirit of Christ that's infectious another person gets that spirit yet now there is hope praise God for that beautiful word there is still hope and there is still hope brothers and sisters as long as we are alive as long as we are willing to repent as long as we are willing to mourn and weep so let us make a covenant with God let's start all over again to put away these wives

and their children the old covenant they had to do that in the new covenant we are told in 1 Corinthians 7 verse 12 and 13 that if you have an unbelieving wife and you're converted you got a keeper but under the old covenant it was quite strong they had to put away those wives and children I want you to just think of this the difficulty of this think if you had to put away your wife and your children whom you love and never see them again it was a pretty costly obedience and it says here let's do that think of that those children whom you have had in your own home you're going to send them away never to see them again that wife whom you have had in your home on a center away never to see them again such was the calling there to be like that Jesus said if any man comes to me and he does

not hate his own wife and children he cannot be my disciple this was discipleship that was being preached here radical discipleship that was being proclaimed by Ezra and it's all there the whole book of Ezra teaches us the principles of building the house of God as Jerusalem he says now those who tremble at the commandment of our God we are not forcing anybody but those who tremble at God's Word let it be done according to God's Word arise for this matter is your responsibility and we will be with you be courageous he said to Ezra and act and Ezra rose and made the leading priests Levites and all Israel take oath that they would do according to this proposal so they took an oath and there was a genuine concern there for the Lord's honor you see in verse 6 after this was after this

happened one would have thought Ezra could have gone back and relaxed on easy chair and say well praise God God answered my prayer and gone around testifying about it he didn't say that he didn't do that he went back before God again fasted and he said Lord I won't rest till this thing is done they've just said they're going to do it but I've got a fast till it is actually done he's not content with he knew that the devil would arrange some bandits along the way again to prevent these people from completing it so he fasted to bind those spirits to make sure these people obeyed God's Word that was painful but Ezra said you got to do it and they made a proclamation through Judah Jerusalem they should all assemble there and whoever would not come within three days should be excluded from the

assembly and all the men of Judah and Benjamin verse 9 assembled and they were trembling there because of this matter and also the heavy rain I just want you to man I want to mention something here in passing concerning rain when we're having meetings here was a great gathering at Jerusalem but a very good purpose to preach radical discipleship and one would have thought well then surely that's the time when there shouldn't be any rain here you know but it says it was terrible rain in fact later on it says also that it was raining very heavily maybe that was to test who who are wholehearted enough to stay here in spite of the rain to obey God's Word so for some people a few drops of rain is enough to prevent them from coming to a meeting or from obeying God's Word that verse is for those

who don't go for meetings when it rains verse 9 they went for the meeting in spite of the heavy rain verse 10 Ezra the priest stood up and said to them you've been unfaithful all this preaching was going on while

this pouring rain they didn't have a hall like this either they were standing in the rain you married foreign wives and you disobeyed God now make confession to your God of your father's and do his will and put these wives away and the assembly said that's right we'll do it but there are many people it's a rainy season we're not able to stand in the open can't be done in one or two days we'll do it with transgressed let's gather the elders they said and let's sort this out now once you find out one thing here verse 15 some people opposed it and they'll always be some people who

oppose this radical message of discipleship if it is hating wife and children and hating father and mother is a bit too much fortunately there were only four they went out from among us that it might be made manifest that they were not of us because they have the spirit of the Antichrist Jonathan J is I am Meshulam and Shabbat I God makes a list of the names of the people who were not interested in radical discipleship but the other exiles obeyed the word and Ezra the priest selected men and they convened on the first day of the 10th month to investigate the matter and sorted out made a list of all the people who had married foreign wives it took three months to do that and then comes from verse 18 to verse 43 a list of the people who had married foreign wives God keeps a list there of

the people who had done it for two reasons one that they had disobeyed him second to prove that when they got light on it they were wholehearted enough even to send away their wives and children in order to obey God it's quite a list these lists in Ezra have tremendous meaning a list of names of people who are wholehearted enough even to offend their wives and children in order to please God be good if our names are on such a list we want to honor God and we're willing to offend anyone even wife and children we want to be in that list because we want to stand for God and build his house well we've learned quite a bit I trust through our study through this book concerning the principles by which God's house is built these things are written for our instruction upon whom the ends of the

world have come and God has given us light from his word so that we might apply these principles not just have them in our head but like Ezra study them practice them and don't not even stop there but teach them to others but it requires that we are wholehearted like these men described here were even to the extent of standing against our own family members what our fathers and grandfathers thought of Babylon what our even against wife and children of need be to stand for the truth of God so that his house can be built in these last days for his glory I want to encourage each of you to study through this book again and ask God to speak to you again for all that we have given in these studies is an outline to help you to meditate on it further so that the Spirit of God can give you further

truths according to your own need with the guidelines that we've considered in our study of these chapters

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