

Week 6: People Rebuilding - and Confession (Ezra 9-10)

The Place of the Passage

The book concludes with dark seriousness. The law Ezra teaches convicts the people of their disobedience through intermarriage with women from neighboring unbelieving peoples. We see the unworthiness of this people and, even more, the holiness of this God at whose word we must tremble, and the mercy of this God who covenants with sinners for saving purposes.

The Big Picture

Ezra leads his people in repentance before the Lord for their disobedience to his laws concerning intermarriage with surrounding nations. Not only repentance, but sorrowful reparation as well, ends this glimpse into the reestablished remnant of God's people.

Reflection and Discussion

Read [Ezra 9-10](#), prayerfully taking in the sober conclusion to this book. Then write your reflections on the following questions. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible, pages 817-820; available online at esv.org.)

Ezra Prays (9:1-15)

Read [Deuteronomy 7:1-11](#). What parts of that passage help us understand the nature of the sin revealed in [Ezra 9:1-2](#)? What parts of [Ezra 9:1-2](#) highlight the grievous nature of the sin?

"Holy race" (v. 2) means literally "holy seed or offspring." In order to be clear that the Bible is not talking about anything like racism or discrimination based on ethnicity, look back to [Ezra 6:21](#). How does that verse show the welcome available to any foreign convert? (Recall Rahab and Ruth; see also [Ex. 12:38](#) and the "mixed multitude.")

Further, read [Genesis 12:1-7](#) and 15:1-6. What is to be accomplished through the preservation of this holy seed?

Consider the response in [Ezra 9:3-5](#). What strong words and actions stand out? What does it mean to tremble at the words of the Lord (see also 10:3 and [Isa. 66:1-2](#))? In what ways do we take God's Word this seriously as his people today? In what ways do we not do so?

Now read Ezra's moving prayer ([Ezra 9:6-15](#)) and briefly comment on repeated words and key words. How would you sum up what Ezra is saying about God's people and about God?

Repenting and Putting Away (10:1-44)

In what specific ways might the response in 10:1-5 inspire both deep hope and honest skepticism? Now read verse 6; how does it add to your reflections?

Read [Ezra 10:7-15](#), in which the people respond to the call to separate themselves (10:11). This episode is difficult, partly because we do not know what happened to these women and children who were "put away" (10:3, 19). They were likely sent back to their own peoples. We know these women had not "separated [themselves] from the

uncleanness of the peoples of the land to worship the Lord,” as had the foreigners welcomed into the worshiping community of God’s people (6:21). From this covenant community context we cannot draw implications for today about individual Christians divorcing unbelieving spouses; indeed, the apostle Paul specifically commands otherwise (1 Cor. 7:12–14). Certainly we must draw implications about whom we as believers choose to marry. The larger parallels relate to keeping ourselves “unstained from the world” ([James 1:27](#)). The “abominations” from which God’s people had not separated themselves included, above all, idolatry—worshiping false gods and participating in associated evil practices. These things had led to the people’s exile ([Ezra 9:1, 11, 14](#); see also 2 Chron. 36:14). Here is the question for us: How do 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 and [Ephesians 5:1–14](#) similarly call God’s people to separate themselves? The people’s sin is a deadly serious matter, and the process of dealing with it is hard and long. What words and details in this final chapter accentuate this truth? Finally, step back and wonder again at God’s sovereign plan to put Ezra in this place at this time. He couldn’t fix these people, but what could he do? Did he? Read through the following sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

GUILT AND GRIEF OF SIN. Ezra responds with intensity to the people’s sin (9:3). His prayers grapple with the grief of sin against a holy God who has been so merciful—yet who is “just” and punishes sin with his “wrath” (9:15; 10:14). “Iniquities,” “guilt,” and “faithlessness” echo through the narrative, pounding home the truth of sin like the pelting rain in the last scene. Even though Ezra is not personally complicit in this sin, he uses the first person plural and identifies with his people, making us think of Christ, the great High Priest who personally identified with our sin, died for it, and purifies us from it.

GOD’S FAVOR. For Ezra, the guilt of sin emerges even more clearly in light of God’s merciful favor to this remnant. The “brief moment” of favor is God’s bringing them back to the Promised Land and enabling them under a foreign king to rebuild the temple, granting them a “secure hold within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery” (v. 8). What a beautiful picture of God’s mercifully bringing them home and opening the way for them to come into his presence as his chosen people. God has punished them less than their iniquities deserved (9:13). Through Jesus Christ, all believers are indeed punished less than our iniquities deserve; we are given not just a brief moment of favor but an eternity.

Whole-Bible Connections

UNCLEANNES. Ezra grieves that God’s people have not obeyed him by separating themselves from the uncleanness of surrounding nations—the uncleanness of sinful souls. The needed cleansing, although not ultimately physical, is pictured physically in the Scriptures—hence the purification rituals, circumcision, and the restrictions on food and people who are “unclean” through disease, blood flow, and so forth (see [Leviticus 11–15](#)). This theme comes to fruition in the ministry of Jesus, who comes to heal all kinds of uncleanness—including ultimately the uncleanness of sin separating human beings from God. When the leper in [Mark 1:40](#) says, “If you will, you can make me clean,” his words ring with the truth of salvation. Truly, by God’s mercy and through the

blood of Jesus comes the “washing of regeneration” that cleanses our souls from sin (Titus 3:5).

PRAYER AND FASTING. In these chapters, Ezra turns directly to God. His immediate impulse is to prostrate himself before the Lord in fasting and prayer—because he knows the Lord who hears his prayer. He loves the Lord and is grieved to the core by sin against him. What an example for us—prayer and fasting coming from the heart, and trembling at God’s Word. Throughout the Scriptures come warnings against the kind of prayer and fasting that have become mere rituals or “for show”; God delights in those who seek him with all their hearts ([Joel 2:12–13](#)). Jesus taught his disciples to pray and fast as those communing humbly with our Father in heaven ([Matt. 6:5–18](#)). And Jesus himself opened the way for every believer to draw near with confidence, in full assurance of faith, with hearts sprinkled clean (Heb. 10:19–23).

Theological Soundings

HOLY SEED. This “holy race” or “seed” ([Ezra 9:2](#)) grows and makes a pathway throughout the Scriptures, leading to Christ alone. After Adam and Eve sinned, God decreed that the “offspring” (“seed”) of the woman would one day bruise the head of the Serpent ([Gen. 3:15](#)). God promised Abraham that his “offspring”/“seed” would be great, blessed by God and bringing blessing to all the nations, dwelling in the land of promise ([Gen. 12:1–7; 15:1–6](#)). In Galatians, the apostle Paul carefully explains that when these promises were made to Abraham, they referred to his “offspring” in the singular, “referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ” ([Gal. 3:16](#)). The wonder for us today is that, as Paul explains, “If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” ([Gal. 3:29](#)).

COVENANTS. God’s covenants with his people require their obedience but depend on God’s faithfulness. In Ezra’s last chapters, the people have “broken faith” ([Ezra 9:2; 10:2, 10](#)) with their God—they have broken his covenant with them. When they cry, “Let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives,” we rejoice in their renewed will to obey, but we also wince, knowing they will not and cannot perfectly keep the covenant they have just made—as we will see in the book of Nehemiah. We are reminded here both of God’s steadfast love to a people who break faith and of God’s faithfulness to his covenant with these people, a covenant to be finally fulfilled only through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Personal Implications

Reflect on the implications of [Ezra 9–10](#) for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord’s blessing and help as you continue in this study. Take a moment also to look back through this unit, to reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.