

EZRA

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Ezra chapter 8 as we continue our study through the Word of God and we finish up this book this evening. Now as we pick up our study in the book of Ezra this evening keep in mind that we are in the second return to Jerusalem from Babylon under the leadership this time of Ezra. The first return, under the leadership of Zerubbabel took place around 538 B. C., and a little fewer than 50,000 made that 900 mile journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. And Zerubbabel's focus is to rebuild the Temple. The place of worship had been destroyed by king Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 586 B. C., and now, some 21 years after the foundation for the Temple was laid, (536 B. C.), the Temple was completed, (515 B. C.).

Now we are into the second return under the leadership of Ezra, who was a priest and a Scribe and this took place around 457 B. C. And the primary focus of Ezra is to see the people get right with God. To see the people sanctify themselves before God, to be set apart for His use. And as we are going to see tonight, it is not going to be an easy job, but it was something that was needed.

As we begin our study in chapter 8 of the book of Ezra, they are preparing for this long journey back to Jerusalem. It was a 4 month 900 mile venture through some difficult and dangerous territory. And God has put upon the heart of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, to send Ezra and all who would go with him, much gold, silver and possessions for the work of God. And we saw last week, that as Ezra read this letter from Artaxerxes he was encouraged by what God was doing in orchestrating all the details. Ezra said, **“Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem, and has extended mercy to me before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes. So I was encouraged, as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me; and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me.”** Ezra 7:27-28.

But again, keep in mind that there was not a lot going on in Jerusalem to cause the Jews to return home as Adeney tells us. He wrote, “There was little at Jerusalem to attract a new expedition; for the glamour which had surrounded the first return, with a son of David at its head, had faded in grievous disappointments; and the second series of pilgrims had to carry with them the torch with which to rekindle the flames of devotion.” So we need to keep that in mind as these faithful Jews make this long and dangerous journey home, back to Jerusalem!

With that as our background, let's begin reading in Ezra chapter 8, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

EZRA 8**VERSES 1-14**

1. Here is a list of all the people that accompanied Ezra back to Jerusalem. And again, keep in mind that the focus of Ezra is to restore the spiritual condition of the people. And this occurred about 80 years after the first return under the leadership of Zerubbabel.

2. Out of all the Jews that were in Babylon, only 1,496 men returned this time. I think this is a good picture of Christians and the Holy Spirit. You see, the Holy Spirit is not going to drive you like cattle, but is a gentleman. Thus, he calls us, invites us, encourages us, inspires us but He will never force us to go and do something, it is up to us to take those steps of faith. How far do you want to go with the Lord? He wants you to go all the way, to take those steps of faith and see where He will lead you. Remember what Paul said in Romans 12:1, **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”** The Amplified Bible puts it like this, **“I APPEAL to you therefore, brethren, and beg of you in view of [all] the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies [presenting all your members and faculties] as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service and spiritual worship.”**

Keep in mind that Paul is speaking of the burnt offering or the consecration offering and the animal was placed on the altar of sacrifice and given totally to the Lord. Paul is saying that we need to do that with our lives, give our life over to the Lord completely, totally for His use and we will never regret that. But if we don't, if we refuse, we will miss out what the Lord wants to do in us and through us, but it is our choice!

VERSES 15-16

1. I like what Ezra does here. Before he embarks on this 900 mile journey to Jerusalem, he stops and evaluates the situation by the river that flows to Ahava. And as he evaluates the situation Ezra recognized that there was a group absent from among them. There were no Levites who were with them! If you remember, Zerubbabel faced a similar problem. When he returned to Jerusalem he came with over 400 priests but only 74 Levites returned! (Ezra 2:36-42).

Why did the Levites not join them? Maybe because they were comfortable in Babylon or they did not want to go back to the Temple duties that they were to do. Whatever the case, they did not join Ezra and as he is looking around, he picks up on this.

2. Why was that a problem? Because Ezra was concerned about the spiritual condition of the people and the Levites were responsible for teaching the Law of God to the people, besides doing other things within the Temple. In Deuteronomy 33:10 we read of the tribe of Levi that, **“They shall teach Jacob Your judgments, And Israel Your law. They shall put incense before You, And a whole burnt sacrifice on Your altar.”** Also, we are told in Leviticus 10:11 regarding the tribe of Levi, **“... that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by the hand of Moses.”** And so they were important in the spiritual welfare of the people.

And besides those that had the ministry of teaching, they were also missing those who would serve in the Temple, the workers who would take care of the physical necessities that went along with the sacrificial system - getting wood for the altar of sacrifice, the water for purification, the bread for the Table of Showbread, the oil for the lamps, and-so-on.

3. So Ezra, realizing that this might be a difficult situation, gets together some men who were wise, and has them go and gather together these men to come back to Jerusalem with them. Ezra did not want to start this journey without members from the tribe of Levi!

VERSES 17-20

1. As you read what transpired here you can clearly see the hand of God upon them and how He blessed them. These men gathered together 38 Levites from 2 families plus another 220 men that worked in the Temple.

2. As we have said before, the Nethinim were probably the descendants of the Gibeonites that tricked Joshua into making a peace treaty with them. When Joshua found out that they were really the enemy and did not come from a distant land, he could not break the peace treaty that he made, so he put them into service as servants in the Tabernacle. They gathered the wood and the water for the Tabernacle and now, many years later, their descendants are still serving in the Temple.

And when you think about that, they did not have to but they chose to serve in the Temple and the reason being, they loved the Lord. Even these Gibeonites God can use for His glory as they serve Him and thus, God can use us as well if we surrender to Him and walk by faith!

VERSES 21-23

1. Keep in mind that Ahava was still in Babylon, a couple of day's journey from where they were located. And it is here, before they go any further, that Ezra is seeking guidance from God, in the direction that they should go. It was a long and tough journey, and what awaited them back in Jerusalem was just as difficult as we will see. The ministry that was going to be taking place needed prayer for guidance and direction and for safety even before they got to Jerusalem.

2. I think that is a good principle for each of us to follow. Before you begin any ministry, lay it out before God, that He may guide you and direct you. There is a right way and a wrong way to do things and many times we do the wrong thing because we have not brought it before the Lord in prayer. It is as Isaiah 58:11 says, **“The Lord will guide you continually, And satisfy your soul in drought, And strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.”**

How long will the Lord guide us? He tells us that He will guide us **“continually.”** Now some of you may not agree with that, but you are wrong. He will guide us continually, the problem many times is we are not listening or we don't want to listen. We want to do what we want and we get in trouble. He wants to satisfy our soul not our flesh and thus, the key is taking the time and seeking His direction in a situation.

3. You have to love the honesty of Ezra. He is boasting to king Artaxerxes about how great the true and living God is. How the God of Israel protects those that are obedient to Him and curses those who are disobedient to Him. And as this king heard all about the true and living God, he gives Ezra millions of dollars worth of Gold, silver and possessions for the work back in Jerusalem.

Now you would think that this is great, a perfect way to start a journey. But Ezra recognizes that all this wealth can be dangerous and he is concerned that this 900 mile journey might be jeopardized by this. You see, along the way were bandits who would be more than happy to lighten your load and take your possessions, and many times kill you. And now he is embarrassed to ask for an armed escort back to Jerusalem, and he brings these concerns, these fears, to the Lord. And God answered those prayers of Ezra.

That is exactly what Paul said we should do in Philippians 4:6-7, **“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”** What we do today in the church many times is we bring our concerns to man. We want the law to save us, to rescue us from the injustices of this world instead of bringing our request to the Lord. We need to learn the lesson!

4. I think many times we are like Ezra. He had no problem honoring God with his lips. He spoke boldly about God before the king but then he had to put into practice that which he said he believed! We do the same and many times, when we have to put into practice what we have said, it becomes a little more difficult, not for God, but for us. You see, it is one thing to honor God with our lips, and another thing to trust Him with our lives. The thing you have to remember is that when you do, you will find out that God is faithful, just as Ezra did. It is as Paul said in I Corinthians 9:14-15, **“Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void.”** Paul put his faith totally in God, no matter what happened!

And that is true of each of us. You see, as Christians we are called to walk by faith and not by sight. We are called to trust our life totally to God. Remember the movie Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade where towards the end of the movie Indiana Jones had to cross from one side of a cliff to another. The only problem was that there was no bridge between the two and a very long drop down to your death if you stepped off that cliff. But Indiana Jones took a step of faith and as he did, he found he was standing on solid ground. He walked by faith and not by sight. Yes, that was a movie but God calls us to do the same. Sometimes things seem impossible by human standards, and yet God is saying for us to trust in Him, and take that step of faith and in it you will find the faithfulness of God. Ezra gave it to the Lord and rested in that as they began this journey with all this wealth the king had given to them!

VERSES 24-30

1. Ezra divides these riches between 12 of the priestly leaders, to see to it that these treasures arrive safely in Jerusalem and again, they had millions of dollars worth of possessions with them on this journey.
2. Ezra told these men that they were responsible for these treasures and when they arrived in Jerusalem, it would be counted before the leaders to make sure it is all there. It is a big responsibility to carry the treasures of God. They were now targets on this journey and thus, they too were learning to trust in the Lord.

3. The treasure we have today is the Word of God. And many times, what happens today is that we tend to water things down and handle God's Word so flippantly, and the reality is, we are not handling what God has entrusted to us correctly. We, as Christians need to present the Gospel correctly and not mishandle the truths of God. We are responsible before the Lord!

VERSE 31

1. Notice that Ezra recognized that it was God who protected them from the enemies that were waiting to ambush them along their journey! How did he do that? By keeping them walking down the middle of the road and not getting off on some side road where the ambush was set up. Paul admonishes us to do the same in Ephesians 5:15-16. He says **“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”** Paul is saying that we need to be careful where we walk, that we should be wise and not fools. Stay on the road that God is leading you on and don't go down some side road where the enemy has set up an ambush for you. Pay attention to where you are going and keep your eyes focused on the Lord. We are going to see that they arrived after some 4 months of traveling safe, with all the treasures they began with!

VERSES 32-36

1. As they returned to Jerusalem, and all the wealth was counted, none was missing. Not only did God prevent the enemy from attacking them along the way, but these leaders resisted from putting their hands into these riches and taking some for themselves. That could have destroyed or hampered the work that Ezra had come to do. What an encouragement this must have been for the people, seeing the hand of God upon their lives. You see, as we walk by faith, as we take those steps, it will also encourage others in the things of God as they see the hand of God at work! May we encourage others by walking accordingly!

2. So far things look good. But as we are going to see, problems are quickly growing and something has to be done about it.

EZRA 9VERSES 1-2

1. As Ezra gets settled in Jerusalem, he gets a report that some of the Jews were marrying foreign women, and even the leaders were involved in this activity. Yes the Temple was built, the sacrifices were going on, and outwardly things looked okay. But inwardly they were moving away from the Word of God and as they did, it lead to ungodly activity. As God said in Hosea 6:6, **“For I desire mercy (faithfulness) and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.”**

2. And please understand that God told the children of Israel, way back in Deuteronomy 7:1-4, that they were not to take for themselves foreign wives. Listen to what the Lord said and I think you will understand why He said this. We read, **“When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly.”**

God wanted these Jews to be a separate people for it is through their seed that the Messiah would come. God did not want them to lose their national identity. Also, He knew that they would turn their hearts from God and towards other gods. And Solomon learned that lesson firsthand back in I Kings 11:3-4, where we read, **“And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David.”**

And when you look at this, what is happening, it is very sad. You see, it has only been some 81 years since their captivity had ended. A captivity that was due to their idolatry and they are once again heading in the same direction and the spiritual leaders were involved in this as well, more than the common people!

3. What a lesson for us. God has called us not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. Now some wonder why, what is the big deal and the big deal is simple, God said so! You see, if they do not love the Lord and you marry them, chances are they will bring you down, draw you away from the Lord instead of you drawing them to the Lord. We would be wise to listen to what the Lord is saying!

VERSES 3-4

1. I think you can get a good mental picture of what was going on, and Ezra was not a happy man to say the least. Not only were they violating the Word of God, but they were getting into the very thing that brought them into captivity in the first place -

IDOLATRY! And Ezra tears his clothes and pulls out his beard. Why would he do that? Because he is devastated at the sin the people were in and it broke his heart, he is mourning over this. Do you have that kind of hatred towards sin? Does sin bother you that much that you mourn over what it is doing in people's lives? You should, Ezra did!

2. What I want you to also notice is that the people who gather around Ezra are also grieving as he is grieving. We see here that it is those who “**trembled at the Words of God.**” Those that had read and obeyed the Words of God, and by their actions, it showed that they loved the Lord. As Jesus said in John 14:15, “**If you love Me, keep My commandments.**” It just makes sense. If we say we love the Lord then we need to obey Him!

VERSES 5-6

1. Ezra falls to his knees and spreads out his arms before the Lord. And he does not say that the people did wrong, but associates himself with the transgressions that have taken place. He speaks of “**our iniquities**” and “**our guilt**” because he recognized that they stood together as a nation, and any breach of the covenant of God affected the entire nation. It is very similar to the prayer of Daniel in Daniel chapter 9!

Ezra also says that he was “**ashamed and humiliated**” to bring these prayers before God, but why? I think Clarke sums it up for us when he wrote, “God had been so often provoked, and had so often pardoned them and they had continued to transgress, that he was ashamed to go back again to the throne of grace to ask for mercy in their behalf. This is the genuine feeling of every reawakened backslider.”

VERSES 7-12

1. Notice what Ezra is saying here. He is not saying that he feels the people are wrong in their actions, but points them back to the Word of God, which exposes their sin. It is the Word of God that points their sin out. It does not matter what I feel it matters what God has said and there is no room for debate about it. Yes, Ezra recognizes the grace and mercy of God but he is concerned that they have pushed God too far. God has been good to them, He has brought them back into the land and this is how they respond to what God has done for them. You can see the brokenness of Ezra in this situation.

2. Today many feel that God is nothing but a big kill joy, trying to stop us from having fun. For example, sex outside of marriage. The thought today is that we should be free to have sex whenever and with whomever we want, as long as both parties consent to it. Understand this, it is so important. God's laws are not meant to stop us from having fun, from enjoying ourselves. They are intended to prevent us from harming ourselves and others, and thus, God's laws are a benefit to us, they are a blessing to us. Look at all the destruction that is seen in the sexual revolution that continues today - it can kill you! God gave us sex to enjoy, and it is very enjoyable. That is the kind of God we serve, He wants what is best for us. But He also has stated that this intimate relationship is to be between a husband and his wife, and not outside of marriage. In fact, studies have shown that people who live together before marriage are more likely to get a divorce than those that wait to have sexual relations and live together after they are married. God was right!

VERSE 13

1. I find this interesting because when people speak of the God of the Old Testament they see Him as this vengeful, hateful, a wrathful God who just wants to punish people. I don't see that and please understand that the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. Ezra speaks of God's grace and mercy and they in no way deserved it but God graciously extended it to them! The punishment they did receive was less than they deserved.

2. Folks, that is true of every one of us! We deserve death, eternal punishment from God but because of His great love for us He has given us life and that life is only found in Christ. You see, sin is punishable by death and yet God gave us life. Now if He just gave us life without satisfying the punishment for sin, then He would be unholy, unrighteous, He would not be a good God. But God did satisfy the punishment for our sin as Christ bore the sins of the world on the cross of Calvary for us! It is as Paul said in I Corinthians 5:21, **“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”**

VERSES 14-15

1. Ezra recognized his guilt and the guilt of the people before God. And Ezra is just pouring his heart out to God. He did not make excuses for their sin he just pointed out to the fact that they were guilty before a holy and righteous God. And keep in mind that Ezra did not want God just to free them from the consequences of their sin, but for them to stop their sin, to get right with God. It is as Jon Courson wrote,

In this powerful prayer offered by a brokenhearted priest, we see neither pride nor empty promises to do better. We see thanksgiving for God's care and adoration of His character. We see confession of sin and acknowledgement of undeserved mercy. And through it all we see the beauty of humility. No wonder it was a prayer recorded for eternity.

- Jon Courson, Jon Courson's Application Bible, Old Testament Volume 1, p. 1239

EZRA 10

VERSE 1

1. As Ezra is praying, God is already working in the hearts of the people, convicting them of their sin. Ezra did not condemn the people, he did not beat the people, but did the only thing that would truly help, he fervently prayed for them and God exposed their sin to them and brought conviction upon their life, causing them to weep over their condition. You see, this is not a work of man but of the Holy Spirit working on the hearts of the people. In his book, *The Second Evangelical Awakening*, Dr. J. Edwin Orr quoted the observations of a high-ranking army officer upon the work of the Spirit in his Scottish town. He wrote,

Those of you who are ease have little conception of how terrifying a sight it is when the Holy Spirit is pleased to open a man's eyes to see the real state of heart. . . . Men who were thought to be, and who thought themselves to be good, religious people . . . have been led to search into the foundation upon which they were resting, and have found all rotten, that they were self-satisfied, resting on their own goodness, and not upon Christ. Many turned from open sin to lives of holiness, some weeping for joy for sins forgiven.

- Dr. J. Edwin Orr, *The Second Evangelical Awakening*

How true that is. We all deal with this from time to time, thinking we are better than we really are. That is until the Holy Spirit shows us what is really in our heart! And it is as Trapp wrote, "They could not wash their hands in innocency, they, therefore, washed them in tears; they knew that as the sins of the old world, so of this little world, needeth a deluge." How true that is!

VERSES 2-4

1. Let's face it, we all make mistakes, we all sin, just as Israel did. The problem is this. If we only recognize our sin and yet do nothing about it, then we are holding back that which we know is wrong, we are not confessing it before God. And truly what a hopeless situation that would be. But even when we fail, there is still hope. All God wants us to do is to recognize our sin, to confess it before Him so we become sensitive to our mistake, to our sin!

Yes, all of our sins were paid in full on the cross of Calvary but remember what John said in I John 1:9, **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** What does that mean? I think John is speaking of fellowship not salvation. You see, sin will hinder our relationship with God and thus, confessing of our sin not only makes us aware of our sin, but helps restore that fellowship with God!

It is as Proverbs 28:13-14 tells us, **“He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy. Happy is the man who is always reverent, But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.”** Look at the kings of Judah and Israel and see what happens as they harden their hearts to God. They ignored their sin. They moved farther away from God. Why? Because the light of God exposes the darkness they were in, and thus, for them to continue in their sin, to ignore their sin, they were continuing to walk in darkness. But our God is so gracious, He is so merciful that if we will confess our sin before Him, those sins we committed today, He will forgive, that fellowship won't be hindered!

The Greek word for **“confess”** is HOMOLOGEO, (hom-ol-og-eh'-o) and it is literally telling us that we are to say the same thing or we are to agree with God regarding sin, to hate sin and not to just hate it, but to avoid it, forsaking sin. The problem comes when we don't agree with God and then we don't forsake the sin, and we break fellowship with God because of it. But notice what we need to do. We need to confess or agree with God regarding sin, forsake it. And God is faithful and just, He will forgive us of our sins. Not only that, He will also cleanse us from all unrighteousness. It is speaking of the sanctification process as God is molding and shaping our lives to be like Him!

2. The people recognized their sin and now Shechaniah is telling them what they need to do to get right with God. To put away all these foreign wives and the children that were born to them. Now this is interesting because the Bible tells us that God hates divorce and in the New Testament Jesus says it was only allowed because of the hardness of man's heart! So why was this done? Did they go too far that even the children were punished in this?

Kidner gives us this insight to what was going on here. He wrote, "While divorce is always hateful to God (Malachi 2:16), and a witness to human 'hardness of heart' (Mark 10:5), the situation described in Ezra 9 and 10 was a classic example of one in which the lesser of two evils had to be chosen. If a serious reason for divorce could ever exist, this had a better claim than most to come within that category." Again, this is not an easy one but it seems that God was allowing that here. In the New Testament, if you are married to someone who is not a Christian, the Lord says to stay with them that you might win them over to the Lord by your example. That your children will be blessed. If they leave you, then there is nothing you can do. The thing is, if you are a Christian; don't marry someone who isn't as we have talked about this evening. This is more of someone who got saved after they were married and their spouse remains unsaved!

VERSES 5-8

1. Please understand that this was not a voluntary decree. If anyone refused to obey what was said they would be cut off from Israel. Now what gave Ezra the right to be so judgmental and harsh? First of all he stood on the Word of God. And secondly, Artaxerxes gave Ezra the authority to punish all those who transgressed the Law of God.

In Ezra 7:25-26 we read, **“And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them. Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment.”**

It is not time to be wishy-washy about sin! It needs to be dealt with and there is no compromise that should be made. You don't make excuses for sin, but you flee from it, you close the door to it or it will not only affect you, but those around you will also be affected by your actions! Ezra took a hard stand. He understood the holiness of God and what God desires of us as Peter admonishes us, **“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”** I Peter 1:13-16.

VERSES 9-11

1. This is an important statement that is being made here and I see many today try to bypass this truth. What God has said to us is not open for negotiation. God did not give to us the *10 SUGGESTIONS* but the *10 COMMANDMENTS!* They broke or transgressed God's Law and now they needed to repent and get right with God. And yes it was raining out but the other reason they were trembling was because they recognized they transgressed the Law of God!

I think Spurgeon puts this into perspective for us as he wrote, "Perhaps you have the notion that repentance is a thing that happens at the commencement of the spiritual life, and has to be got through as one undergoes a certain operation, and there is an end of it. If so, you are greatly mistaken; repentance lives as long as faith. Towards faith I might almost call it a Siamese twin. We shall need to believe and to repent as long as ever we live." How true that is!

VERSES 12-15

1. When you look at the response of the people you have no other explanation than this was a work of the Holy Spirit that brought conviction upon their lives and they responded appropriately. Here we see Ezra telling them what they needed to do and their response is simple, "... 'Yes! As you have said, so we must do.'" Ezra 10:12. They must do these things, not think about it, but do it!

2. Now please understand that they were not trying to get out of doing what was right, but because of the weather conditions and the multitude of people involved in this sin, they suggested that each city should come one at a time, until all was completed, and the situation was made right.

3. In verse 15 we see four people oppose what is going on and we are not told why. Maybe they thought Ezra was going too far. Maybe they did not want to separate from their wives and children. Maybe they thought Ezra was taking too much time to deal with this issue. I doubt it is the last one, but it is possible. Whatever the case, these four opposed this work but their objection did not stop the work from being done!

VERSES 16-17

1. Again, they wanted to get right with God but there were so many people involved in this sin that it took them 2 months to hear all the cases and complete all the work.

VERSE 18

1. Notice that even the son of Joshua, also called Jeshua, was involved in this sin. The sin reached deep into Israel and now it needed to be removed. We are going to see the list of people, even the priests who had taken these foreign wives.

VERSES 19-43

1. We see here some 113 men that had transgressed the Law of God. And the names are not listed to condemn them. In some situations, such as a man cheating on his wife, the wife will make him go and carry a sign around stating what he did wrong, hoping that public humiliation will keep him from doing this again. But this here was not a condemnation, but a commendation. You see, they turned from their sins; they repented from their sins and corrected their problem. It is as Paul said in II Corinthians 7:10, **“For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”**

You see, godly sorrow, a sorrow that leads to repentance and separation has eternal ramifications. We are all going to face issues in our lives and what we do with them will affect our walk with the Lord! We need to understand that this was not an easy task for them to do. They had to separate from their foreign wives and children. And for us, as it was for them, correcting our sins is not always easy but necessary. May we make the right choice!

VERSE 44

1. I think what God is saying in this portion of Scripture, in the book of Ezra, is that if you want to live a life that is completely surrendered to God, it will require some difficult decisions and actions on your part. Some things that may not be popular with the world and it will not be popular with the world. The world is at war with God and fights against the things of God. And God wants us to be a separate people, separated from the world, not united with them in fellowship because we will be dragged down into their sin with them, as we too will worship their gods. Remember what we read in Ezra 6:21 as the Temple was completed during the first return under Zerubbabel. We read, “**Then the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the LORD God of Israel.**”

May we have that kind of love, that kind of passion for the Lord! That we are willing to separate ourselves from the things of this world and live unto Him!