

## Lesson 27

Last week Ezra had just been told about the problem of intermarriage that was occurring among the remnant in Jerusalem and the surrounding cities. The idolatry that led to the exile had been caused in large part by the idolatry that had come in through intermarriage, and here are God's people once again engaged in intermarriage with idolaters. How will Ezra react to that news?

### Ezra 9:3-5

3 And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished. 4 Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. 5 And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God,

Verses 3-5 show the effect that the news of the people's infidelity had on Ezra – he tore his garments, pulled out his hair, and sat down astonished (dumbfounded, overcome, or appalled). He was not apathetic when it came to sin, and he wanted those around him to know that.

Why was Ezra so upset by their sin, while many others it seemed were not? Ezra understood the seriousness of the situation. Sin such as this was the reason they had been exiled in the first place – and here they were doing it again! He must have wondered if they would ever learn!

Why did Ezra understand this, while others did not? Because Ezra studied the law, and he knew the law. If we don't take sin seriously today, is it perhaps because we don't study and know the word of God? Perhaps our view of the seriousness of sin is directly proportional to our knowledge of God's word. That certainly seems to be the case with Ezra. How do we react to sin? Do we just shrug our shoulders and write it off as just human nature, or do we react like Ezra did?

We can see a big difference here between Ezra and Nehemiah. When Ezra hears about the sin, he pulls out his own hair in verse 3. In Nehemiah 13:25, here is how Nehemiah responded when he was faced with the same problem: "And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off **their** hair." Ezra pulls out his own hair while Nehemiah pulls out the hair of the offenders!

I suppose there is a time to pull out your own hair, and a time to pull out other people's hair! (Although I don't remember seeing hair-pulling anywhere on the list in Ecclesiastes 3!)

Ezra sat there until the time of the evening sacrifice (about 3 PM). The reference to the evening sacrifice suggests that Ezra had probably taken a seat near the temple. That is, Ezra had intentionally positioned himself in a public place so that the remnant could see his grief.

Ezra was quickly joined by those who realized that the remnant was in danger of suffering the

judgment of God. The phrase “every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel” refers to those who were attempting to live according to the Law of Moses.

Isaiah 66:2 – “...but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.”

Ezra is upset. Ezra is overcome. Ezra is worried. So what does Ezra do? Ezra prays, and his prayer is recorded for us in verses 6-15.

### **Ezra 9:6-7**

6 And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. 7 Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day.

Verses 6-15 give us Ezra’s prayer, and that prayer is centered around the confession of sin and the importance of the remnant. We can compare this prayer of Ezra in Ezra 9 to that of Daniel in Daniel 9 and that of Nehemiah in Nehemiah 9. (Chapter 9 seems to be the prayer chapter!)

Confession of sin is the major theme of this prayer. We see a first confession of sin in verses 6-7. (We will see a second confession of sin in verses 10-14.) Ezra uses two metaphors to describe their sin – “for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.”

The switch from the first person singular in verse 6 (“I am ashamed”) to the first person plural in verses 6-7 (“our iniquities are increased” and “we been in a great trespass”) is interesting. Ezra identifies himself with his people and with the sin of his people. He did not come into Jerusalem to accuse them as an outsider – he was instead standing with them and describing their sins as “our” sins and “our” guilt. This scribe was praying the Publican’s Prayer!

In verse 7, Ezra looks back through their history – and he recognizes that it has been a history of sin and rebellion against God, and he understands that their exile had been caused by that sin and rebellion. “It is as if Ezra has realized that immediately in front of him are all the cumulative iniquities which have heaped up through history. What an extraordinary view of sin!”

The phrase “the kings of the lands” is a reference to the kings of Assyria and Babylon who were used by God to exile his people. God’s judgment of the Jews is described as including warfare (“sword”), exile (“captivity”), the loss of their possessions (“spoil”), and the loss of their national pride (“confusion of face”). And their humiliation was continuing to this very day, Ezra says in verse 7.

Humiliation by foreign kings was nothing new for Israel and would continue to be nothing new. After the conquest by Babylon, the Jews were under the rule of the Persians, Alexander the Great, the Ptolemies, the Seleucids, the Romans, the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Turks, and the British.

The Jews have enjoyed only two periods of independence since their exile by Nebuchadnezzar: their modern state (since 1948) and from 165 to 63 BC following the Maccabean Revolt.

In verse 6, Ezra says “I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God.” While Ezra was blushing because of the sins of others, Jeremiah 6:15 describes a people who did not blush about their own sin: “Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush.” (Jeremiah 6:15) Into which category do we fall? Into which category does our society fall?

That second question is easy. We live in a society that has been taught from a young age to never feel any shame – and we are now reaping that whirlwind. We live in a society that does not know how to blush.

In 1939, a single four-letter word word in the movie “Gone With the Wind” made the entire nation blush. That was 77 years ago. What does it take to make this nation blush today? Do we even know? Where will this nation be 77 years from today?

Our mission as the Lord’s church is to proclaim the gospel to the world. But no one will ever believe the good news until they first believe the bad news – and the bad news is that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and the wages of sin is death. Why would anyone pay any attention to the gospel if that person does not believe he has ever sinned? Perhaps that more than anything explains why the gospel seems to fall on deaf ears these days – more so than at any time in our recent history.

We need to follow Ezra’s example and blush both for our own sin and for the sins that are heaped up around us in this sin-soaked world. If we forget how to blush – who is left?

### **Ezra 9:8-9**

8 And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. 9 For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.

In verses 8-9, Ezra comes back to their current situation under the Persian kings. During the time of the Babylonian kings, the Jews had no hope of returning to Judah, but that situation had changed when the Persian Empire took over.

The “little space” or “brief moment” in verse 8 was a period of about 80 years (from 538 to 458) starting with the decree of Cyrus during which the people had been allowed to return to Jerusalem. Ezra understood that that door could close at any time. Yes, God opens doors, **but God also closes doors**. We should not presume those open doors will remain open forever, especially if we fail to walk through them. We know of one great open door that is open now (Revelation 21:25) but that door will close with a permanent thud on the final day of judgment. That is not the only door that

God will close. God opens doors and closes door today as well – and we need to use those open doors while they remain open.

In verse 8, Ezra also recognizes that they were a remnant, and that God had spared that remnant for a purpose. And they were just a remnant. Perhaps a few hundred thousand Jews lived in Israel during the time of Ezra. Millions had been killed or carried away into captivity by the Assyrians and Babylonians.

The phrase “remnant to escape” suggests that the remnant included only those Jews who had escaped from the exile and returned to Judah. That is, those Jews who remained behind were not considered part of this remnant, at least not in the eyes of Ezra. The remnant were those who had separated themselves and come out from the exile, and that is true today as well. Doesn’t this bring another verse to our mind? “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.” (2 Corinthians 6:17)

Verse 8 also mentions the “secure hold” or “foothold” that God had given the remnant. The KJV used the word “nail.” The literal Hebrew term is “tent peg,” and it refers to a place where a nomad could pitch his tent after a long journey.

“A little grace had been granted by God to his people; a small remnant had found its weary way back to its home and driven a single peg into the soil; a solitary ray of light was shining; a faint breath of freedom lightened their slavery.”

Where have we driven our tent peg? Where is our nail planted? Doesn’t this bring another verse to our mind? “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.” (Hebrews 6:19)

Finally, verse 8 says that their eyes were brightened and that they were revived in their slavery. The people were dead while in exile, but now they had been revived. Yet many Jews remained in exile, which Ezra describes as slavery in verse 9. Doesn’t this bring another verse to our minds? “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” (Galatians 5:1)

But verse 9 also tells us that God had not forsaken them, even in their slavery, but “hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia” God had demonstrated his love to them while they were in exile. Doesn’t this bring another verse to our minds? “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

We often say that we can find Jesus on every page in the Old Testament. Here Jesus seems to be in every verse! In this return from exile we see a beautiful prefiguring of the gospel of Christ – and when we read the prophecies of Zechariah I think we can see that this was one of the big lessons that God wanted his people to learn from the exile.

Verse 9 reminds us that this remnant had a purpose: “to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem” Some argue, based on this verse, that the temple had been destroyed during the reign of Xerxes and was rebuilt again during the time of Ezra. It all depends on how we interpret “we” and “our” in verse 9. We have already seen Ezra use those terms to refer to his people in the past as well as in the present (see verse 7).

Thus, it seems most likely that the rebuilding in verse 9 refers to the earlier rebuilding under Cyrus and Darius (which all occurred during the “little space” of verse 8).

Some have argued from the use of the word “wall” in verse 9 that when Ezra arrived the wall around the city must have already been constructed. From this they argue that Ezra must have arrived after Nehemiah built the wall, and they rearrange the chronology accordingly.

There are several problems with that view. First, Ezra was rebuilding the physical wall. Remember what we saw in Chapter 4, when Ezra went forward in time to show examples of hostility from their neighbors. One of those examples was a letter that their neighbors wrote to King Artaxerxes (the current king) that caused him to stop work on the wall. They did more than stop work on the wall, they destroyed the wall. That wall was being built by Ezra. The destruction of that wall was the report that Nehemiah received in Nehemiah 1:3 that led to his own return. So, the fact that Ezra mentions a wall does not mean that Ezra showed up after Nehemiah.

But, second, the word translated “wall” here is the Hebrew word for “fence,” and it does not usually refer to a city wall, but rather refers to a stone fence that forms a border between property owners. It simply means a protected area. In fact, that seems likely here from how the word is used in verse 9 – “to give us a wall **in Judea** and Jerusalem.” How could a city wall have been built around all of Judea? A better translation of that phrase may be the one found in the ESV: “and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem.”

Also, in addition to “protection,” the word “fence” or “wall” denotes something else – “separation.” You sometimes hear people say that we should not be in the business of building fences, and I agree that we should not be building fences where God does not want them. But I don’t think we are building fences, despite the frequently heard charge that we are. I think instead what we are doing is **recognizing** the fence that God has built – a fence of separation between his people and those who are not his people. God’s people are on one side of the fence, and the world is on the other. And what is that fence? We should ask instead, **who** is that fence. “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6) “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” (Colossians 1:13) “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.” (John 10:9)

God’s people are in Christ Jesus, and the world is not. God’s people are in the kingdom of Christ, and the world is not. And how did God’s people cross that boundary? “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Galatians 3:27)

This is not rocket science! The gospel is not complicated! It is simple, and it can be understood by all. And for that we should be thankful to God every day, just as Ezra is in these verses. God has built a wall of protection around us! And anyone who wants to can enjoy that protection if they will obey the gospel.

## **Ezra 9:10-12**

10 And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments, 11 Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to
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possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness. 12 Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever.

Verses 10-12 are directed to Ezra's listeners as well as to God, causing one commentator to describe the prayer as a "sermon prayer." Ezra wanted the people to understand that all the disasters that had befallen them as a people had happened because of their disobedience to God's commands, and so he uses the language of the Bible to help them understand. (Even today, we can often tell from someone's prayer how well he knows and loves the Bible.)

It is a sad commentary on our own modern society that the description in verse 11 is a very accurate description of our own country in its present state: "an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness." That is the land in which we live. The question is whether we will change that unclean land by proclaiming the gospel, or whether we will be changed by that unclean land.

Ezra also connected those commandments with the prophets who had warned the people about their peril. The citations in verses 11-12 come from Genesis, Deuteronomy, Leviticus, Lamentations, 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, although the texts are not literally quoted. Despite all that had happened to the Jews, Ezra understood that they had been punished less than their iniquities deserved. They deserved death, but God had given them life. Where is the gospel in the Old Testament? A better question might be where isn't it!

### **Ezra 9:13-15**

13 And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this; 14 Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping? 15 O LORD God of Israel, thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee because of this.

In verses 13-15, Ezra returns to the remnant. The Jews could have been completely wiped out – as God had once considered almost entirely doing (Exodus 32:10) and as had happened to many of the peoples who had opposed the Jews – but they were not. Instead, God had spared a remnant and brought that remnant back to the promised land. This remnant was evidence of God's love and God's grace. But if that remnant sinned and rebelled, then it was in danger of being destroyed. But even then God's plan would have continued. God could find another remnant – there were communities of Jews scattered all around, even down in Egypt.

In verse 15, Ezra says that “we cannot stand before thee because of this.” The sin of some was the responsibility of all, with the result that none could stand. A little leaven had leavened the whole lump (1 Cor 5:6). It was now Ezra’s job to “clean out the old leaven” (1 Cor 5:7) by taking steps to purify the remnant.

A clear message here for us is that remnants have responsibilities! The Lord’s church is also a remnant. Do we understand what that means? Do we understand our own responsibilities? If the Lord’s church turns its back on God’s word, then what will be left? Will we cause God to look elsewhere for a faithful remnant? “Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8) It is our responsibility to make sure the answer to that question is yes! If we don’t take on that responsibility, who will?

### **Ezra 10:1**

1 Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore.

Ezra 10:1 brings us back to the situation described in 9:3-5 and tells us what happened at the temple after Ezra’s prayer. Notice that while Ezra 9 speaks of Ezra in the first person, Ezra 10 speaks of Ezra in the third person. Why the switch? We don’t know for sure, but one commentary suggests that this back and forth shift may be intended to let the reader see the events from different perspectives. Another suggests that “the shift occurs to highlight the shared responsibility for the divorces among the various groups that supported the decision.”

“The third-person narration distances readers from Ezra and the events immediately surrounding him, creating a sense of a more objective point of view. ... This method of presentation makes it clear that though Ezra was at the center of things, he was not the one making them happen.”

While Ezra prayed, he lay prostrate and weeping. “Casting himself down” in the Hebrew means that Ezra kept “casting himself down” to the ground. This activity caused a crowd to gather, no doubt wondering what had caused this important official to behave this way. By the time the prayer was completed and the events in Chapter 10 began, we are told that a very large crowd had gathered.

Ezra’s emotional state infected those around him, and by the end of verse 1 they were also weeping bitterly. Most had heard all or part of Ezra’s prayer, so they knew what was causing his great distress.

### **Ezra 10:2-4**

2 And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. 3 Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and

of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. 4 Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it.

Shecaniah speaks out in verses 2-4. He was likely a leader of the people, as well as someone who agreed with Ezra over the problem of intermarriage. (He also held Ezra in high esteem, calling him “my lord” in verse 3.)

Shecaniah is identified as the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam. There are several other Shecaniahs mentioned in Ezra and Nehemiah, but it is difficult to identify this Shecaniah with any of them. The length of Shecaniah’s genealogy indicates that he was a person of some importance.

From Chapter 2 we know that the family of Elam had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon with Zerubbabel and Jeshua. This family is also mentioned in 8:7 and 10:26, an indication that it was one of the most significant families among the returned exiles.

Note that Shecaniah uses the first person plural (“we have trespassed”) much like Ezra did in his prayer. Since Shecaniah is not listed among those who were guilty of this sin later in this chapter, he most likely was simply another faithful Jew like Ezra who had great concern for the spiritual welfare of his people.

His father was Jehiel, and we also find a Jehiel in verse 26. If they were the same person, then Shecaniah was denouncing his own father here in verses 2-4. I think we have all known people who have changed their view about certain sins when family members have fallen into those sins — Shecaniah was not such a person.

In verse 2, Shecaniah expresses hope that God might refrain from judging the nation if it repented and changed its ways, which he then encourages Ezra and the people to do. Yes, Shecaniah says, we have sinned, and yes, the sin has been great (“we have trespassed against our God”), but there was still hope. It was not too late to repent and make things right with God. But how?

In verse 3, he tells them how. “Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them.” The marriages were illegal, and there was one and only one solution to an illegal marriage – it must be ended. Both the foreign wives and the children from the mixed marriage must be put away, presumably sent back to where the wife had come from in the first place.

The phrase “put away” in verse 3 means divorce rather than just separation. It is the same word found in Deuteronomy 24:2 discussing divorce.

These marriages were sinful. Nehemiah 13:27 makes that point very clear – “Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?” It was a “great evil.”

“Foreign women were married contrary to the law of God. The marriages were illegal from the outset. The sending away of the women is to guard the exiles against the continuation of an illegal act. With their foreign wives they lived in sin.”



To many and perhaps to most today, this solution seems very harsh. And there is a reason for that – it was very harsh, but something much more important was at stake. Had the intermarriage continued, the Jewish race and the Jewish religion would have become unrecognizable in just a few generations. God had a plan for the Jews, and that plan required that they maintain their purity and their faithfulness to God’s law. This small group of Jews was surrounded by a large group of hostile, polytheistic neighbors that threatened to consume them – and that was a grave danger.

Ezra also knew the devastating problems that had come from the foreign marriages of Solomon and the kings who followed him. Drastic measures were called for in such a situation, and drastic measures were taken. History tells us that other Jewish communities in exile gradually disintegrated – that happened, for example, to the Jews in Egypt that we have previously discussed. This was a watershed moment in the history of God’s people.

And for those who point to the departure of the children as being excessively harsh, perhaps they should have asked the departing mothers for their opinion. In ancient societies (as today), when marriages were dissolved the children typically went with the mother. The harshness of that edict was directed more to the fathers, who would likely never see their children again. But sin has consequences—then and now—and often those consequences affect the innocent along with the guilty—then and now.

Continuing to address Ezra, Shecaniah says in verse 4 what every leader wants to hear: “Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it.” He recognizes the obvious – that it is the task of the leader to lead, but he tells Ezra that the people are with him. And he encourages Ezra to “be of good courage, and do it,” which is good advice for leaders in any generation. We don’t know whether Ezra needed this encouragement to act, but it certainly didn’t hurt. (Nehemiah, on the other hand, never needed any encouragement to act forcefully!)

Shecaniah was a man of action who recognized the urgency and seriousness of the situation. He knew what needed to be done, and he did what he could to see that it was done. He encouraged his leaders to act when action was required. We should pray that God will continue to raise up Shecaniahs!

The proposal of Shecaniah reminds us of the actions taken by the Jews in Joshua’s day. After a somewhat successful campaign to conquer the land of Canaan, the nation gathered at Shechem to make a covenant with the Lord. In that covenant, the nation resolved to put away its foreign gods and serve only the Lord (Josh 24:23-25). Unfortunately, both covenants, Ezra’s and Joshua’s, would prove to be short lived.

### **Ezra 10:5-6**

5 Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they swear. 6 Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away.

Upon hearing the words of Shecaniah, Ezra immediately rose from his knees. He made the elders of the Jews take an oath that they would do according to the word they had heard. Once again, the Jews are divided into three groups – the priests, the Levites, and the laity.

Ezra then made his way from one of the outer courts of the temple to the chamber of Jehohanan. This chamber would have been one of the many rooms of the temple complex.

Earlier we mentioned that some commentators argue that Ezra arrived *after* Nehemiah rather than before Nehemiah. Verse 6 is often quoted as the best evidence for that position.

Here is what we know:

(1) In 458 BC (if we maintain our current chronology), Ezra is said to have entered the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib (Ezra 10:6).

(2) In 445 BC, Eliashib is the high priest when Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 3:1, 20).

(3) Around 410 BC, according to the Elephantine papyri, someone named Jehohanan was high priest.

From this it is argued that Ezra must have returned when Jehohanan was high priest (that is, after 410). But this argument is based on nothing but conjecture. The Biblical text simply states that Ezra made use of Jehohanan's chamber.

Nehemiah 12:22 tells us that Johanan was the grandson of Eliashib. Those who think Ezra arrived after Nehemiah argue that the grandson of Eliashib could not have invited Ezra to use his chamber in 458 BC, but only much later. But that argument falls apart with the simple observation that Johanan was very common name, and particularly so once it had already been used in a family. That is, since we know that Eliashib had a grandson named Johanan, it is even more likely that Eliashib had a brother or a son named Johanan.

Also, Eliashib was high priest at least from the time of Ezra's arrival through the time of Nehemiah (458–445). Eliashib's son Joiada succeeded him (Neh. 12:23). Upon Joiada's death, Jehohanan, Eliashib's other son, assumed the high priesthood (Neh. 12:22). If each of these men was high priest for at least twenty years, Jehohanan could have been a young man at Ezra's arrival and the high priest fifty to sixty years later.

We don't know why Ezra went to this chamber. Perhaps he wanted to enlist the support of Jehohanan. It is also possible that he wanted to confer with one of the religious leaders of the remnant before progressing with his plan.

“At this point, Ezra has torn his garments, pulled out his hair and beard, sat down, fallen on his knees, stretched out his hands, prayed, made confession, wept, prostrated himself, taken an oath, and fasted. Ezra's behavior reveals not only his love for his people, but also his hatred for sin. It should be remembered that Ezra has not even personally committed the sin over which he is in such extreme anguish. May our response be the same when we view sin in our midst today.”

## **Ezra 10:7-8**

7 And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem; 8 And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away.

In verse 7, a message is sent out commanding all men to appear in Jerusalem within three days for an investigation. Those who failed to do so would have their property confiscated and would be banned from the community. From 7:25-26, we recall that Ezra had authority from the King to take such actions – and in fact Ezra had authority to take much more drastic actions than this. Ezra is restraining himself! He had the full backing of the Persian government to do this, and to do much more if he wanted to do so.

The proclamation allowed the exiles three days to make their way to Jerusalem. Judah was a very small territory at this time, and Jerusalem could easily be reached within three days from any city in the region.

The Hebrew word translated “confiscated” or “forfeited” originally meant that the property would be destroyed (Joshua 6:21), but by this time it meant that the property would be delivered to the priests (Ezekiel 44:29).

Exclusion from the community meant that they would not be allowed in the temple and might even lose their citizenship. They would not be allowed to participate in the daily sacrifices, and they would not be able to call upon their kinsmen for help. They would be regarded as foreigners by the Jews.