

# Bible Study - May 13, 2020

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Good evening, everybody. Welcome to our Wednesday night Bible study. Tonight, we're going to finish up the book of Ezra. But there's only two chapters left, so we're going to take a little more in-depth look at some subjects, because these are a couple of rather interesting chapters.
- To recap, well, by the way, Ezra's in the Old Testament. If you get, basically, if you open up to about the middle of the Old Testament, you'd find it. It's before Nehemiah, which is before Job.
- Look it up in the table of contents. Anyways, we studied chapters 1 through 8, and we have two chapters left. Now, what had happened was the people of Israel were taken off into captivity in Babylon.
- The Babylonians took them to their capital city to make their nation stronger. The Persians, on the other hand, had a different idea that the way you make a nation strong is by letting people feel some freedoms and liberties, so they sent them home.
- to their own region, and so they went back to Jerusalem. And when they got back to Jerusalem, they started building the temple. Now, the people in the area around offered to help. They gave them money, and then they did something else.
- [ 1 : 1 1 ]     They offered to help with the work, and that's when the people coming back said, they said, no, you're really not the right people to be working on God's house. And I said, that's where we started the animosity between what in the New Testament I referred to as the Jewish people and the Samaritans, which were actually cousins.
- They were people who had a similar heritage, going back to, say, Abraham, but that somewhere around the exile, their bloodlines had parted ways.
- And the people that were left in the region intermingled with other folks, and the ones coming back felt that they had pure, proper, good bloodlines.
- That's going to be very important for our conversation tonight. So they started to have animosity with the people around them. So the people around them petitioned to stop the work in Jerusalem and actually had it on pause for a while until the Persian emperor reviewed things and said, no, it's all right.
- You can go ahead, start rebuilding the temple. Here's the money. Start into the work. So this is where we pick up the story and the people of Israel, the Jewish people, had built the temple.
- [ 2 : 2 5 ]     They had dedicated it. It wasn't a very fancy temple, but it was something that they could start to worship God and make the sacrifices that were normal. So we pick up the story in chapter 9 of Ezra, where it says, after these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, the people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples.
- with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Pozzasites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, Amorites, and Mesquitebites.

They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and the officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness.

So here we have a situation which is actually one step beyond what we had talked about before. Now we have the people that were there, the people that had been left in the region who had this kind of mixed bloodline and mixed religion, mixed heritage.

And now the people who consider themselves have pure Jewish bloodlines, have decided, I like that girl. I think I'll marry her. I like that young man.

[ 3 : 49 ] I think I'll make him my husband. And they started to intermarry with the people around them. Now, we might not find this unusual, especially in a multicultural, multi-religious nation like the United States.

But in that day and age, it was considered to be wrong on many different levels. One reason was because if you mix up your heritage too much, you mix up the story too much, eventually you don't have a common story.

What we sometimes refer to as his story, history, which is the thing that draws us together. So for instance, my grandfather came from Germany.

My grandmother came from Germany. So I could see that my heritage is back in Germany, at least on my father's side. But when we became Americans, when my grandparents became U.S. citizens, they taught me that my story included people like Abraham Lincoln or George Washington or the founding folks that made our nation what it is.

And so the story of the nation became my story. And even though I had adopted it, I was also adopted into the family we call Americans. And by doing so, we become a unified, strengthened nation.

[ 5 : 12 ] One of the struggles we have today is we have so many competing stories and so many competing voices as to what's right, as to what our heritage is, as to who we are, that in some ways, we're losing that common story that holds us together.

Now, it's good to have the flavor of other cultures and other peoples. I love eating a wide variety of foods. I think it's fun to celebrate different holidays and special events and occasions.

I think we've learned a lot from other cultures and other people. I'm not arguing that we need to be like the people of Israel that were saying we had to keep everything completely pure.

We'll talk about that a little more tonight. But what I am saying is a common story, a common heritage, a common belief system makes a common united people.

That's why we as a church, even though we come from various different backgrounds with all kinds of different political ideas, with all sorts of different heritages and ways we came together here, because we carry the same story that we take from the scripture and even the same story we take as a congregation, we become one people united together even with our differences.

[ 6 : 37 ] So it's important to have that common story. Now, that being said, what they're talking about is they're talking about a concern of people mixing together.

So let's read a little further and see what it says. When I heard this, I tore my tunic. This is Ezra speaking. Now he's in the first person. I tore my tunic and cloak.

I ripped my clothes. Now, we don't think much of that. We have so many clothes, we fill up bins with them all the time. We're always getting rid of so many old clothes. But back then, clothing was very expensive.

It wasn't easy to come by. So when you tore your clothes, it was a sign of abject humility and anguish. And so they tore their clothes. He pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled.

Pulling hair. Wow. I wouldn't want to pull hair out of my head. I sure wouldn't want to pull it out of a beard, but I don't have a beard. But that's got to hurt. That shows just how much anguish, just how much sense of true remorse or frustration he has with this situation.

[ 7 : 47 ] And he sat down and it says he was appalled, disgusted, couldn't believe they had done such a thing. So he says, Then everyone who trembled at the words of God of Israel gathered around me because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles.

And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice. So, at this point in time, they're just pondering it.

They're taking some time to let it sink in for an entire day. Now, what is it that they're appalled about? Well, we have to go and look a little bit around in our Bible.

So we're going to go to Joshua chapter 23. Joshua is to the left of our book, right towards the beginning of the Bible. And in Joshua 23, verse 11, we read, do I have the right part?

Okay, let's read it and see what it says. And when the Israelites heard that they had built the altar on the border of Canaan of Galilath near the Jordan of the Israelite side, the whole assembly of Israel gathered at Shiloh to go to war against them.

[ 9 : 12 ] So the Israelites said, and Phinehas, son of Elizar, the priest, to the land... I think I might have the wrong section. Okay.

Well, I'm looking in the wrong chapter, but that's because I'm reading in chapter 22 and I'm looking for chapter 23. Now that'll make more sense. Okay. So it says, in chapter 23, verse 11 of Joshua, so be very careful to love the Lord your God.

But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you, and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you.

Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes until you perish from this good land which the Lord your God has given to you.

Okay. So this is where this whole idea of don't mix with the folk of the land because there were many behaviors that the people of the land during Joshua's time engaged in that were just wrong.

[ 10 : 29 ] The Canaanites practiced child sacrifice. They caused young girls to go to the temple and act as prostitutes until they lost their virginity.

I mean, they did evil and horrible things. And what God said is if we start to live in this culture in such a way that the culture becomes our world, then somehow we will lose that sense of who we are as the blessed people of God.

So it's difficult. It's difficult because there has to be a boundary where we say this is who we are and no further.

We have to say that it's not everything and anything is okay because then we lose the concept of who God is and what it means to have a religious faith.

Sometimes people think people with a religious faith are judgmental. And it's not for us to judge people who don't belong to our faith, but it is ours to say this is where our boundary is.

[ 11 : 38 ] This is what we will do. This is what we will not do. This is what we will consider okay. This is what we will not consider okay. We're not saying what other people can do.

We're not judging other nations or other religions or other folk. We're just saying what we are and who we will be and the standards and ethical values we'll live to.

Which without that there's no boundaries. There's nothing we believe. When you believe in everything you believe in nothing. And so that's the difficulty that they're working with.

And the people at the time of Joshua were pretty bad folk. Now in the New Testament for those of you who prefer a New Testament section we turn to 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians chapter 6. I could have had these all marked but that means this gives you an opportunity to also find them.

[ 12 : 42 ] 2 Corinthians chapter 6. I can't get these pages to come apart. There we go. chapter 6 and in verse 14 we read Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.

For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Satan?

Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God.

So what he's trying to say to us is very simple that if we intermingle too much we can find ourselves to be people that are not in a position of fidelity to our own God.

Alright? Now notice it didn't say have nothing to do with unbelievers. it says don't be yoked tied with them. Picture two oxen and they put a yoke on the two oxen's necks so they go together.

[ 13 : 58 ] This is a very close relationship. Your best friend is probably not best to be somebody who doesn't believe in your faith. Your spouse is probably best not to be someone who doesn't believe in your faith.

Now, I don't want you to misunderstand if you are already married it's a little different. Paul says if you're married to somebody who doesn't believe in God but they want to stay married to you stay with them because who knows that by your faith you might bring them to God.

But if you're not married and you're looking for a spouse you're looking for somebody to walk through life evenly with you're best to go with someone who shares your story your values your principles your goals your hopes your dreams your faith your belief.

Okay? So, that's the argument they're making. That's why they're so upset. Alright? So, let's find out what happened and then we're going to continue on this subject because there's a lot more to talk about in this area.

So, in verse 5 it says then at the evening sacrifice I rose from myself abasement with my tunic and cloak torn and fell on my knees with my hand spread out to the Lord my God and prayed.

[ 15 : 10 ] I'm too ashamed and disgraced my God to lift up my face to you because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens.

From the days of our ancestors until now our guilt has been great because of our sins we and our kings and our priests have been subject to the sword and captivity to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings as it is today.

Okay, so we have two or three things that happen there. First of all when you go before God we need to recognize we're talking to the perfect almighty all powerful omniscient God.

You don't walk in and say hey God down here and do what I want. God isn't our servant we're his. So we go before God and we need to first recognize who we are in relationship to God so he confesses we're not perfect we're not good.

In fact we're not even worthy to come into your presence. There's a sense in which we need to understand that our relationship to God is such that if God is going to do something for it he does it out of grace or as a gift.

[ 16 : 30 ] There's nothing God needs from us. So when we go to need something from God we need to recognize that even the request even the request for forgiveness isn't necessarily appropriate but we come anyways even in the midst of our sin we come before God because that's what God calls us to.

He calls us to recognize who we are and what we are and what we are in comparison to God so he goes to God and he says we've messed up.

Now note he's talking about the nation we go before God and often we say Lord I have sinned but he's saying Lord we have sinned our whole nation in fact we keep messing up so much and we have so many problems in our history because we have not been faithful to you.

That raises a whole other issue doesn't it? How do we know the difference between God punishing us for our disobedience and just problems that we face?

You see sometimes God tries to correct us like a parent would correct a child. If I had a little child and the little child was reaching for the fire and the only way to stop them from reaching from the fire was to wrap them a little bit on the hand that little bit of pain is better than the pain they'd have by putting their hand in the fire.

[ 18 : 06 ] If we're heading towards something truly dangerous and wrong and God does something to stop us he punishes us or disciplines us or corrects us he's really doing it for our benefit not for his.

Abuse is when the person who's doing the punishment takes pleasure in the punishment discipline is when you use just the amount necessary to change behavior and God will occasionally use the punishment or the discipline of God to change our behavior that's what he did with the people of Israel they weren't listening he sent prophets he sent priests he sent people to say to them you are going the wrong way you have to change he tried all sorts of different ways to give them a minor discipline to see if that would help eventually they basically said God can't do anything we can't be taken into captivity because that would embarrass God so we can do anything we want and at that point God said that's it you're done I have to go to a place I don't even want to go to I'm sending you into exile now that is not to be misinterpreted as being synonymous with bad things happen to everybody the rain falls on the good and the bad alike actually that means the blessings of

God but also difficulties happen to good people so in Luke chapter 13 we read the words of Jesus Luke chapter 13 one more page it says there were some present at the time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices Jesus answered you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way I tell you no but unless you repent you too will all perish or the 18 who died when the toddler of Siloam fell on them do you think they were more guilty than all of the others living in Jerusalem but I tell you I tell you no but unless you repent you too will all perish a number of years ago we were sitting with a group

I believe it was a men's group and someone shared a prayer joy a praise they said I'm thankful to God that I was in a car accident the other day and I wasn't hurt and we want to praise God for good things but somebody sitting at the table said does that mean that everybody who dies in a car accident or gets hurt in a car accident is somehow evil or done something wrong or God doesn't love them anymore that's a real good question isn't it and Jesus gave the answer didn't he just because some people have good things happening to them doesn't mean that they they're blessed by God sometimes even bad people have things that we call good happen to them and just because bad things happen to people in this broken world doesn't mean necessarily God is punishing them sometimes bad and difficult things happen to everybody we're in the midst of a pandemic that's a very powerful word a disease so widespread that it traverses the whole world is God punishing us some people think yes others would say no it's just stuff that happens in this culture you know the creation is made in such a way that you can call it

God's plan you could call it nature natural selection you could call it whatever it wants but it's designed whether we like it or not to keep the strongest going and weed out the weakest right now because of the pandemic for instance we're going to have a number of businesses that are suffering and hurting at the end of this some will survive and some will not some makes the human race stronger. Now I know that sounds insensitive and I don't mean it to be because I suffer and I cry when people that we love die and I don't want to say let's just sacrifice the weak. We happen to be in a culture where we don't have to sacrifice the weak. We can protect those who are weak and those who are struggling. The Bible even calls for us to do such a thing. All I'm simply saying is the pandemic is a part of the natural design of this world and the world is designed to make the species, to make the economy, to make the culture stronger by weeding out those who are weaker. That's how it works. Now that may seem harsh but it's just the way it is. So pandemics happen to everybody. Some people get sick. Some people don't get sick at all.

[ 23 : 48 ] Some people get sick and die. That's tragic for all of us. But the pandemic doesn't actually have a moral sense to it. There's not a good pandemic or a bad pandemic. It's just the way it is.

And Christians will get the coronavirus and people who don't believe in God will get the coronavirus and some will not and some others will not. It's not because it's some kind of punishment from God.

So this is a very difficult topic because we're trying to discern when is God disciplining us and when is it just tough things happening. The Bible has a verse that says that God will never test us beyond our ability to overcome it. He will never give us something that isn't common to people.

So he's not going to try to destroy us. He's not going to try to... because the purpose of discipline is to make us better. So if the discipline would actually destroy us then it's not discipline anymore.

It's destruction. It's vengeance if you will. So when God is trying to discipline us it is something that we will get through and he will give us a pathway to get through. But when it's just a struggle we're facing it's just a struggle we're facing. They are trying to discern in the situation what should they do. They feel that they've done something wrong. And so they're reacting to it.

[ 25 : 21 ] In verse 8 he went on to say, For a brief moment the Lord our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in his sanctuary. And so our God gives light to our eyes and a little relief to our bondage.

Though we are slaves our God has not forsaken us in our bondage. He has shown us kindness in the sight of the kings of Persia. He has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins. And he has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem.

So what Ezra is simply saying is this is actually a time of blessing. We've been fortunate. It's been a tough time.

Our nation was destroyed. We had all sorts of destruction and plagues and difficult things lead up to that. Then we were taken into captivity. We had to live in a foreign land and we risk completely being annihilated and everything.

And now God has been so good to us. He's brought us back to this place where we can worship him in his temple and his sanctuary again. And where we can be protected.

[ 26 : 31 ] He's even caused the king of Persia to look after us. Now he notes that they're in bondage.

Sometimes it's hard because we think the only time that we're blessed by God is when everything is going well.

But Ezra is looking for the positives even in the midst of the struggle. They're in bondage. They still don't have their own country. They still have to listen to the king of Persia.

The nation has still not been established. But he sees good things. We've been brought to Jerusalem, brought back to build the temple.

We have a wall around us to protect us. God is blessing us and we should see the blessings even in the midst of our struggles. When I'm watching the service on Sunday morning, I see things I don't see when I'm creating the service.

[ 27 : 39 ] And one of them is the blessings. As they scroll the blessings through the offering, all the people who are just looking in the midst of a broken situation and finding joy and possibilities and happiness.

The planes flew over today to honor the people who work in the hospitals. People are going out of their way to help other people. I looked and there were hardly any masks left last week, so we said something and I looked again and now there's some more.

Still not enough, but at least we're keeping up barely with what we need and I praise God for that and the work and generosity of those who are doing it.

We can find blessings even in the midst of a pandemic. And Ezra found that blessing and he proclaims it to God in his prayer to God.

So he's remembering who he is compared to God and he's also remembering to thank God, right? for all that God has done.

[ 28 : 50 ] In verse 10 he says, But now, our God, what can we say after this? For we have forsaken the commands you gave through your servants, the prophets, when you said, The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruption of its people.

By their detestable practices, they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other. Therefore, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters for your sons.

Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them at any time that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it to your children as an everlasting inheritance.

So he's reminding himself, the people listening, and just saying to God that when Joshua came into the land, there was a great concern that they would keep their ways separated from the people of the land and not mix in with these people who are doing evil and broken things and not in that way dilute or maybe even destroy what their faith, their ethics, their values, their belief system was.

We were just talking about that, right? How much do we do that if we do mix in with the people around us too much?

[ 30 : 19 ] It's an interesting thing. So he considers what they've done wrong. What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet our God, you have punished us less than our sins deserved and have given us a remnant like this.

Shall we then break your commands again and intermarry with the peoples who commit such detestable practices? Would you not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivor?

Lord, the God of Israel, you are righteous. We are left this day as a remnant. Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it, not one of us can stand in your presence.

Okay. So, there we are. They feel that what they've done is wrong because they intermarried with the culture around them.

Now, there's a lot of stuff going on here. And part of it is that the rules that we have for one situation may or may not apply to another situation.

- [ 31 : 33 ] So, there, looking at the time of Joshua, when Joshua was coming with a lesser population to conquer the land of Israel, and he was told by God not to mix with those people because it would destroy their fledgling nation, their faith that they had in God.
- But these people around them, the ones that they're complaining about, they've already said they worship the same God.
- Remember that back in the beginning of the book? They said they worship the same God. They asked to help build the house of God. They're not necessarily the enemy.
- And if we go back into the Old Testament, into the law of God, I want to look, if we can, for just a minute at the book of Leviticus. That's not one we go to very often.
- Leviticus chapter 19. There's a wonderful passage in there. Leviticus, one of the first five books of the Bible. Chapter 19, starting in verse 33.
- [ 32 : 54 ] And it says this, When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native born.
- Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord, your God. Wow. Treat them as if they've been there all along.
- Treat them as native born. When you have somebody who is vulnerable and weak and struggling living in your community, do we make them less than?
- God says we make them one of us because to the Israelites, he was reminding them, there was a time that they were living in Egypt and they depended on the charity and the kindness of the Egyptians and they weren't happy when they were treated as slaves and less than and they shouldn't treat other people that way and neither should we.
- People are people are people. We should always treat them with respect as we would want to be respected as well because that's what God tells us to do.
- [ 34 : 15 ] Love our neighbor as ourselves. So we wrestle with this whole issue because we have a situation where these people are again telling each other that the people around them are evil.
- I'm not so well versed in this that I could say that there were no evil practices among the people in the land they were living with.
- I imagine there were but I also know just from the book itself of Ezra that we read that the people around them wanted to worship God wanted to build God's house were willing to give money to help build God's house and the people who came back from the exile were saying no we don't want anything to do with you and that as they said a couple Bible studies ago this became the origins between the animosity between the Samaritans and the Jewish people who worship the same God.
- So there's a difference between mixing in with things we know are wrong and just simply say if you are not exactly like I am in your faith belief I won't have anything to do with you.
- The person who started the Methodist movement years ago named John Wesley said in essentials we need to have unity. The things that really matter we are saved by the grace of God the gift of God to forgive our sins that is an essential.
- [ 35 : 51 ] In the non-essentials liberty if it is really not that important why are we arguing about it? I have been to many many different types of churches we worship in many different ways but we worship the same God and I think God is pleased by many different varieties of worship.
- The reason we worship in different ways we have different things that we like or that please us or maybe we just like a particular type of music or maybe those are the talents and the abilities and gifts that God has given to the people we have.



We don't know for sure. All we do know is that God is pleased even by this variety. So in essentials we need to be united but in non-essentials we need to have liberty and he said in everything we need to have charity or in other words we need to be looking to be loving and accepting and grace-filled towards people as we'd want to be treated but they feel they've done something wrong and that leads us to the words that Paul wrote where he said you know if your neighbor thinks something is wrong then it's wrong for them he was talking about food sacrificed in temples and he was basically saying you know if you sit down to a meal you don't know where the food came from you don't know if it was sacrificed in a temple or not and for some people they won't eat that because they would say that's wrong but maybe you don't care well then you shouldn't engage in that practice to offend your neighbor then again you should have the ability to do what you know is right and wrong see it gets very complicated because these people think what they're doing is wrong because they've married with the people of that region

I don't think that they did now I do understand when you've got a small little group of people that you're trying to hold a faith together with you need to have a unified story but it doesn't say that they tried to make any effort to bring these people into their story they could have adopted a man they could have just said you know if you're going to intermarry they have to convert to our faith they have to become part of us they need to be one of us they didn't even allow that possibility because they were feeling so broken about this it's what they read and they interpreted while Ezra was praying and confessing weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God a large crowd of Israelites men, women and children gathered around him they too wept bitterly then Shekariah son of Jehiel one of the descendants of Elam son of Ezra we have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us but in spite of this there is still hope for Israel so they feel that they have done wrong too which changes the dynamic a little bit right but they see that this isn't so far gone that there is no hope that's important we all sin we all fall short of the glory of God we all do things wrong but when we recognize first of all that we've done something wrong and number two that God can forgive us and we can always have hope because God is the God of tomorrow the God is the God of hope not the God of despair and of sorrow of yesterday and brokenness okay so in verse 3 of chapter 10 he says now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children in accordance with the counsel of my Lord and of those who fear the commands of our God let it be done according to the law verse 4 rise up this matter is in your hands we will support you so take courage and do it wow so we've got a lot of stuff going on here tonight all sorts of different theological conundrums you like that word conundrums how do we know that God was still against them intermarrying with the people of the region we don't know that it doesn't say in here

Ezra had a vision from God and God said you're offending me it doesn't say that we don't have a prophet who came came up and was risen up by God and God told them to tell the people it doesn't say that it just says that Ezra realized that they had broken a rule set up by Joshua that said in that time they weren't supposed to marry the people of that region but now we're in a different time different place literally a couple thousand years later different people different circumstances to what changes about God and what remains the same which are which and how do we know that was posed to me in seminary and I've remembered it ever since because it is the ultimate question of our faith what things are eternally right and wrong and what things are just for a particular time why would God tell Joshua don't have anything to do with the people in the land and then later on tell Moses to write in the law that the people should treat foreigners with respect and treat them like one of themselves and now we have

[ 41 : 53 ] Ezra saying it's wrong again how do we know and after all throughout the Bible if you read it including in this in the book of Esther that we read last week or a few weeks ago it says that other people joined the Israelites they joined the Israelites when they came out of Egypt they joined the Israelites when they became an empire they joined the Israelites when it looked as if the Israelites were going to have a successful situation under Mordecai and Queen Esther so people have been adopted into the story for centuries it is part of the way of God now these people are closing tight tight now we talked about this when we first started looking at the book of Ezra we have to be very careful because when we start looking in and start thinking it's all about us we get smaller and smaller and smaller but when we look out to the people around us we can bring the grace of God to the world and transform the story so it becomes other people's stories and they become like us and they become us some things change some things remain the same which are which and how do we know in it's a fun little story in the book of Luke we have a little time tonight as I said so we're kind of taking a look around a little bit no I'm sorry in the book of Acts chapter 9

Acts chapter 9 Dr. Luke wrote the book of Acts so it's same writer Acts chapter 9 one more page over okay I'm having trouble because I'm using references that aren't working either I'm writing things down wrong or something else I don't know what it is yeah here it is it's Acts chapter 10 sorry about that I keep putting the right wrong thing down on my notes okay in chapter 10 it says that Peter in verse 6 was staying with Simon the tanner whose house was by the sea and he had a vision so this is the vision in Acts chapter 10 verse 9 about noon the following day as they were approaching

Peter went up on the roof to pray he became hungry and wanted something to eat and while the meal was being prepared he fell into a trance and he saw heaven open and something like a large sheet being let down to the corner by its four corners to the earth by its four corners it contained all kinds of four footed animals as well as reptiles and birds and then a voice told him get up Peter kill and eat now this included animals that would be considered unclean or in other words they were non-cosier to use a more modern term which was against the rules that Peter was raised on surely not Lord Peter replied I've never eaten anything impure or unclean and the voice spoke to him a second time do not call anything impure that God has made clean do not call anything impure that God has made clean that happened three times and the sheet was taken back up into heaven so after that we were allowed to eat bacon if it wasn't for that vision of Peter's we wouldn't eat bacon isn't that interesting the rules back in the ancient days said we couldn't eat bacon they say a lot of things like that but now because of one man's dream we can eat it so what's the difference here well the difference here is that

Ezra is trying to discern what's right and wrong by what he knows by what he thinks by what people around him say and by what he's read in the scripture it's all good stuff Peter on the other hand is trying to discern what's right and wrong by what he knows by what people around him have told him by what he's read in the scripture and and by the voice of God true wisdom comes when God reveals it to us from heaven every once in a while God changes things and every once in a while we change things when God changes things things that were unclean become clean and become pure when we change things we muddy up the waters what Ezra did muddied up the waters that's my belief that's what I feel what

Peter did released blessings because you see what happened was is Peter's vision didn't have anything to do with eating bacon by the way it was about saying the good news the grace the wonders the blessings the hope of God is for everyone what Ezra is saying is it's ours it's all ours we're the chosen ones we're the holy ones nobody else gets it right that's a shame because God didn't mean for it to be that way he intended intended for us to open up our faith to the world no we shouldn't be changed by the culture around us we shouldn't adapt to rules and ways of living and patterns of behavior that we know disagree with what God wants just because the people around us are all doing it but also we don't reject those people we give to them the grace and the power of God so that they can be transformed and God can make them pure and holy and wonderful too we're supposed to be as the parable says a yeast in the batch of dough

[ 48 : 37 ] I know yeast is hard to get nowadays a yeast in the batch of dough we put in a little bit and it spreads everywhere we are to transform the world not have the world transform us so they thought they were doing wrong we have to recognize that and because of that because they felt they were doing wrong they felt it was important to confess to God which was right to ask for God's blessing which is right and to be willing to do whatever needed to be done to make things right with God which was right one thing they didn't do is they didn't ask God to speak to them about this I think he might have said something that would have changed their minds so anyways chapter 10 verse 5 we've got to finish this chapter then we finish the whole book there's quite a bit left yet here it says Ezra rose up and put the leading priests and Levites and all Israel under oath to do what they had been suggested and they took the oath then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the room of Jehoan son of Elisheb while he was there he ate no food and drank no water because he continued to mourn over the unfaithfulness of the exiles fasting that's what he did a proclamation was then issued throughout Judah and Jerusalem for all the exiles to assemble in Jerusalem anyone who failed to appear within three days would forfeit all his property in accordance with the decision of the officials and the elders and would himself be expelled from the assembly of the exiles that's pretty tough you don't shove this meeting we're taking your house your land everything you've got

I think we'd show up right I think we'd show up you're taking everything dude really so they said if you're one of us you're going to be at this meeting you've got three days three days to get there and it's not that far because they're really all gathered in a region around Jerusalem they're not scattered all over the world or anything within the three days all the men of Judah and Benjamin had gathered in Jerusalem on the 20th day of the ninth month all the people were sitting in the square before the house of God greatly distressed by the occasion and because of the rain it was raining out so they're miserable they're not happy they're feeling as if their life is crumbling apart they think they've offended God and they're sitting in the rain not a fun thing verse 10 then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them you have been unfaithful you have married foreign women adding to Israel's guilt now honor the Lord your God the God of your ancestors and do his will separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives wow give up your family wow sacrifice is a word that we're not too used to anymore every once in a while we have somebody make a sacrifice we think of the military or maybe even the doctors and nurses sacrificing or at least risking their health years ago

I was asked what would I be willing to give my life for in my faith that was a hard question but then somebody in the group said I want to change it what would you be willing to give your child's life for wow that makes it really hard not a lot of things I remember the story of Abraham and Isaac remember Abraham was asked by God to take Isaac his son his one and only son up on a hill and prepare him for a sacrifice so he took him up he had him all prepared he had the knife raised up over Isaac's body as he was tied up on the altar and God stopped him and said no you don't have to give up your son I just know now that you have that faith that commitment see there's a sheep over there use that use that that sheep that goat for the sacrifice instead so Abraham was willing interestingly by the way his wife Sarah never let the boy go anywhere near dad anymore but that's read about it in the Bible that's a different aspect of the story what I would be willing to sacrifice these people are giving up their family wouldn't it have just been better to have their family have the opportunity to become faithful followers of God it's noble that they're willing to make this sacrifice

I don't know that it's right though the whole assembly responded by the way I do know that most Bible interpreters would say they did the right thing I don't think they did I don't think they did I tried to read the Bible for what it says not for what I wanted to say and I think they made a mistake here I think they were trying to do the right thing but it didn't necessarily come out the right way we have that whole problem with this corona thing don't we we're going to flatten the curve and now we're saying everybody has to stay stuck in the house forever I'm not arguing we need to be yahoos and going out running around I've got my mask in my pocket here okay I'm willing to follow the rules and try to try to keep people from getting infected see here we go mask right but all of a sudden we've gone from we're just going to try to make the hospitalizations less we don't overwhelm our health system to empty hospitals where people still can't do anything sounds like the rules changed and maybe they're right maybe they're not but I've talked to you before about what I call unintended consequences unintended especially negative consequences we're trying to do the right thing for all the right reasons but are we doing something harmful over here without even realizing it to tell people they have to break up with their family they have to send their children away that they can't be with their family anymore because otherwise they're not faithful to God that's harsh

I didn't see a command from God I didn't hear a word from God didn't see an angel of the Lord appeared to be very careful when we make decisions that we don't have huge unintended consequences I talk about that all the time whenever I meet with people I'm leading this ministry now we are closed I don't know what will happen and when we'll open we're trying to work on that plan trying to figure it out if you have an idea feel free to share it with me I'm not exactly sure how it's going to work because we don't want to have unintended consequences on the other side either how do we make the right decision for the right reasons without having negative unintended consequences in this case I think they made in some ways the wrong decision for good motives and maybe what they thought were the right reasons in verse 12 it says the whole assembly responded with a loud voice you are right we must do as you say but there are many people here and it is the rainy season so we can't stand outside besides this matter cannot be taken care of in a day or two because we have sinned greatly in this thing there's a lot of people here this isn't going to be simple you don't just send your family packing in a day or two this is going to take some time Ezra you are going to have to give us time to work this out let our officials act for the whole assembly then let everyone in our town who is married a foreign woman come at a set time along with elders and judges of each town until the fierce anger of our God in this matter is turned away from us ok we have this first time we've heard about the fierce anger of our God

[ 57 : 15 ] I haven't seen any place in which they are being punished but they seem to feel that they will be in verse 15 it says only Jonathan son of Eshel and Josiah son of Tikva supported by Meshulim and Jebethi the Levite opposed this now I don't know what they opposed it doesn't say they just opposed something maybe they were the ones that saw what was right remember the two spies ten twelve spies went down into Israel ten of them came back and said we can't go there we can't conquer the land there's giants in that land and two came back Joshua and Caleb and said sure we can take the place but nobody listened to the two maybe the two were right maybe these two were right so the exiles did what was proposed Ezra the priest selected men who were family heads one from each family division and all of them designated by name on the first day of the tenth month they sat down to investigate the cases in verse 17 and by the first day of the first month they finished dealing with all the men who had married foreign women okay and how many were there well it says among the descendants of the priest the following had married foreign women from the descendants of Joshua son of Jezebek and his brothers

Messiah Eleazar Jerob and Gedalia that's four okay they all gave their hands and pledged to put away their wives and for their guilt they each presented a ram from the flock as a guilt offering so there were four in that group from the descendants of I've got a calculator here here we go four plus from the descendants of Imar Hanai and Zebediah that's two from the descendants of Hiram Messiah Elijah Shemiah Jehiel and Uziah from the descendants of Peshire Ilani Messiah Ishmael Nathaniel Josabed and Elisha from the Levites

Jobazad Jehiel Jehiel and Shemiah Jehiel Jehiel Jehiel Jehiel Jehiel Judah and Iliah that's from the musicians one I'm just going to skip the names from the gatekeepers three and among all the other Israelites we've got the descendants of Parash 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 and then 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37.

Let's add that in. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46.

OK? So 110 men, all these had married foreign women, and some of them had children by these wives. So 110 spouses and some children, we don't know how many, were sent packing on their way.

[ 61 : 18 ] Boy, I'm glad this didn't become a bigger issue. That's still a lot, isn't it? Can you imagine that? Let's just say that there were 100 more children or so. 200 people just cast out.

It reminds me of when Sarah said that Abram had to cast out his slave wife, and Hagar and Ishmael were sent off into the desert with nothing.

I don't think it's right. I don't think it's right. I don't think God wants us to send people away. I think God wants us to draw people in, bring people closer to him.

It's an interesting story, the story of Ezra, because it talks to us about what are we supposed to be, how are we supposed to be doing things. And we're reading it because it's a story from the exile, and I chose it because it's a book about coming out of the exile.

We might go into Nehemiah next week. We'll see. We're going to go into another book. I know that, but I'm not sure if it's Nehemiah or which. But it's about coming out of the exile, and how do we go about it and do it right?

[ 62 : 25 ] So we're going to have to make decisions that we intend will not have unintended negative consequences. So we want to open our church sometime, hopefully not too far in the future.

Hopefully we'll be able to do it right and do it in a safe way. Hopefully we'll do it in such a way, though, that we will include people. Somebody said, why can't we continue to have the Bible studies this way on Wednesday night?

You know, more people attend now than they did when I had it in person. Maybe we can do both. Somebody said, can't we have worship online the way we're doing now? Well, maybe not the way we're doing, but some kind of a hybrid of both.

Because why not? Why not include it? We have more people attending worship now than we did when we did it in person. Isn't this interesting? More people are coming to Jesus because of this event.

Because we've been sent into exile. We're bringing more people to God. So we don't want to shut down opening up to the world. We want to figure out how can we reach out and bring people to us.

[ 63 : 26 ] Now, they can come to be with us in the sanctuary, but they can also come to be with us through the Internet. And then, what about the people who are vulnerable? What about our senior citizens? What do we do for them?

If we're all gathered together here and everything's going well and we're feeling good, what about the people who are not able to come? How do we continue to include them? So God is calling us not to draw closer and say, I got mine.

I'm okay. We've taken care of us. God is calling us to reach out. Reach out. And bring the faith of God to the world. Don't call anything unclean that God has made pure.

God wants to make you pure tonight. God wants to make all the people of this world pure. We confess before God. We admit our need for grace. And God changes, transforms us from the inside out.

God blesses us. So let's turn our hearts over to God. Dear God in heaven, I have sinned. I've done things I shouldn't do.

[ 64 : 34 ] I've broken your rules. Sometimes even when I try to do right, I do wrong. Forgive me, Lord.

Cause me to repent and turn towards your way of doing things. That I might be blessed by you. Dear God, live within us. Transform us and change us.

Help us to reach out to the people around us. Help us to be the kingdom of God in this kingdom of the world. Help us to be a blessing. To bring the peace, the hope, the joy, the wonder of God to the world.

And make the world pure and holy. Bless us tonight. And bless us always as we offer our prayers. In the name of Jesus Christ who said to pray. Our Father, who art in heaven.

Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses.

[ 65 : 38 ] As we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom. And the power.

And the glory forever and ever. Amen. And now if you've prayed with me. You and I together. Have opened ourselves up.

To the grace. The blessing of God. In the name of Jesus Christ. Your sins are forgiven. Glory to God. Amen.

Go in peace. We'll see you next week. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[ 66 : 34 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.