

EZRA 10

REPENTANCE AND REFORMATION

Ezra's humiliation and confession of sin made good impressions upon the people. No sooner was it made known in the city that their new governor was in great grief over their sins, there presently assembled to him a very large gathering of people. Men, women, and children all wept very sorely when they saw Ezra weeping thus.

A good suggestion was made by a man named Shechaniah upon this occasion. The place was filled with weepers, but it seems that no one spoke until this man stood up and made a speech addressed to Ezra. He acknowledged the national guilt, and he summed up all of Ezra's confession in one sentence: "We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives" (verse 2). The matter was too plain to be denied, and it was too bad to be excused. But Shechaniah also encouraged himself and others to have hope; for although the situation was bad, there was hope that the people could still be reformed. Now that the alarm was given, a spirit of repentance seems to have been poured out upon them, and they began to humble themselves before the Lord.

Shechaniah advised that a speedy and effectual course should be taken for the separating of the people from the strange wives and their children, and he showed them how it should be done. The people bound themselves with an oath that they would do according to his words, and no time was lost; they struck when the iron was hot, and soon set the wheels of reformation rolling.

Ezra summoned all the people of Judah to assemble at Jerusalem within three days, and – being authorized by the king to enforce his orders with annexed penalties (chapter 7:26) – he threatened that whoever refused to obey the summons would forfeit his estate and be outlawed. Within the time specified, the people made their appearance in the street of the house of God in Jerusalem; and the Lord gave them a token of His displeasure in the great rain that was being poured out upon the earth at that time. Ezra told the people why he had called them together now; it was because he found out that they had increased the trespass of Israel by marrying heathen wives. He called them together so that they might confess their sins to God, and so that they might separate themselves from their idolatrous wives.

The people not only submitted to Ezra's jurisdiction in general, but also to his inquisition and determination in this matter: "As thou hast said, so must we do," they acknowledged (verse 12). There is hope concerning people when they are convinced that it is not only good to part with their sins, but also that it is indispensably necessary. It was agreed that this act of repentance and reforma-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The people's hearts are prepared for reparation of their sins – verses 1-4
- ❖ Shechaniah's proposal is carried out, and all agree on reformation – verses 5-17
- ❖ A list of those who were guilty of marrying heathen wives – verses 18-44

tion should be carried out, but not in a general assembly. They decided that each of these cases should be tried and examined in the people's local cities; and when this method of proceeding had been agreed upon, the people were dismissed.

Two men named Jonathan and Jahaziah were the ones who were to bring up the cases for review, and they were helped by two honest Levites. The commissioners who gave judgment in these matters included Ezra and certain chief men from among the people, who were qualified with wisdom and zeal for this service. It took them about three months to finish this work, but they exercised a great deal of diligence; for otherwise, they could not



have dispatched so many cases as they had in such a little time. It is probable that the persons who were brought up on charges of the crime of marrying heathen wives were simply asked what reason they could show why they should not be parted from them; and if the wife had indeed been proselyted to the Jewish religion, it was likely not required for her to be put away – but the discernment of this fact would require great care.

The names of the persons who were guilty of this crime are recorded here to their perpetual reproach. Many of the priests – even from the family of Jeshua the high priest – were found guilty, although the law particularly forbade the Levites to marry those who were profane (Lev. 21:7). Those persons who should have taught others the law broke it themselves; and by their example, they emboldened others to do likewise. But having lost their innocence in this matter, they did do well to give an example of repentance; for they promised to put away their heathen wives, and they took the appointed way of obtaining pardon, by bringing the ram which was appointed by the law for a trespass offering (Lev. 6:6). About 113 persons were named here who had married heathen wives, and some of them had even had children by them. One would think that after this reformation, this grievance was permanently redressed; and yet, sadly, we meet with it again in Nehemiah 13:23 and Malachi 2:11. Such corruptions are easily brought in, but they are not purged out again without great difficulty. The best reformers can only make endeavors for change; but when our Redeemer Himself shall return, He shall effectually and permanently turn away ungodliness from His people!

Lord, we pray for grace to enjoy the blessedness of the person whose sin is forgiven, and whose iniquities have been covered by the blood of Jesus (Ps. 32:1). Bestow upon us the strength of the Holy Spirit, so that we may be enabled to carry out the necessary works of reformation in our lives, as the people in Ezra's day did. Amen.