

## 21.12.2019 DEALING WITH BAD DECISIONS

***“And I said: ‘O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens’ ” Ezra 9:6***

Last week we saw how quickly the Jews relapsed into unfaithfulness despite making covenant promises in the presence of Ezra and Nehemiah. Within a few years they were repeating all their mistakes. This week we study the last of these as described in Nehemiah 13:23-30; the ‘unequally yoked’ marriages between Jewish men and pagan women.

The work of Ezra described in chapters 9 and 10 dealt with the problem of inter-marrying with heathen peoples.

*When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you...you shall not 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. Deuteronomy 7:3, 4*

After the intercession of Ezra, the people covenanted to put away their pagan wives and be true to the Lord.

*“The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass.” Ezra 9:1, 2*

Ezra’s prayer of confession and intercession at that time:

*“...should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor? O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day. Here we are before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this!” Ezra 2:14, 15*

The people’s response:

*Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly. And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, “We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this. Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.” Ezra 10:1-3*

But just a few years later, Nehemiah discovers that his people had lapsed into their old ways of marrying pagans.

*In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people. Nehemiah 13:23, 24*

Last week we saw that Tobiah the Ammonite was in league with the High Priest and had a room in the Temple that was allocated for the Treasury. When the Ammonite is removed from the Temple, Satan makes sure that the Ammonite enters the people’s houses. One commentator states it thus:

'The enemy has more than one way of establishing a destructive bridgehead into the life of God's people. An Ammonite man may well be evicted from the temple, but there are plenty of Ammonite women now living at the heart of Israel's spiritual and moral life, the family. They have been excluded from the temple, but they have gained a foothold in the home.'

In addition to being an expression of disobedience to God command, there were consequences to this disobedience:.. *And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people. Nehemiah 13:24*

'If these children did not know the language of Israel, how could they read the Law or participate in the holy services? If a generation was lost to the faith, what was the future of the nation?' *W. Wiersbe*

Not only were these children cut off, because of the language barrier, from knowledge of God's word and participation in his worship, but it is more than likely that their mothers maintained their allegiance to their own gods and encouraged their children to do the same.

Nehemiah reminds them of the example of King Solomon, one of the greatest and most beloved of their kings, gifted with wisdom from God. But his marriages to unbelievers led to his personal unfaithfulness.

*"You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin. Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?" Nehemiah 13:25-27*

*King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites; from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love...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. 1 Kings 11:1-4*

Nehemiah's greatest enemy, Sanballat has married his daughter to the High Priest's grandson.(13:28). Nehemiah drives the grandson out.

Nehemiah then cleansed the people 'of everything pagan' (13:30).

The book of Nehemiah ends with an admission that the Law and the Old Covenant are not in themselves sufficient to maintain a people in close relationship with God. They needed to enter the new covenant relationship with God, based not in adherence to merely to a written code, but on an intimate knowledge of God (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Thus the books of Ezra-Nehemiah and Malachi points forward to this new covenant, realized in the person of Jesus Christ, with the promise of divine enabling for God's people truly to live as God's people.

The Bible is absolutely clear that believers are not to look for spouses among unbelievers, for they will turn our hearts away from following God. If we feel today that in such homes the difference is not so obvious, then it is because the church has accepted the world's ways, so that the lifestyle of the unbeliever is not very different from that of the believer. The children have also absorbed the language and culture of the world. Many of us have 'come out of Babylon' but our hearts are still in Babylon (the world).

### **The New Testament references to marriage with unbelievers:**

There are 2 main references and each one deals with a different situation:

1. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 gives us the general principle – when looking for a spouse, do not go looking among unbelievers.

*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:*

*“I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”*

*Therefore, “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” 2 Corinthians 6:14-18*

2. 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 deals with the particular circumstances in the church at that time. Many Gentiles had come to faith in Jesus but some of their spouses (who they had married prior to conversion) did not get converted. Paul addresses this issue in this passage.

### ***Under the Law, under the curse...***

As long as men and women promise God to obey His Law, they are putting themselves ‘under the Law’.

The Bible says *‘For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.” Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.” Galatians 3:10-12*

This was the history of Israel and Judah. Their example should be a warning to us *that ‘without Christ, we can do nothing’ John 15:5* and a call to come to Him in faith daily, so that His Spirit can produce the fruit of righteousness in our lives.

*Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Galatians 3:13, 14*

He has borne the curse for us and given us the power of the Spirit to live righteously. And yet many, either through ignorance or unbelief are choosing to live under the law, and under the curse.

### **Conclusion:**

Though the lesson is mainly about marriage, there is a wider relevance for us today as spiritual Israel.

During the time of Ezra and Nehemiah:

- A remnant had come out of Babylon
- God had promised that they would return and restore Jerusalem through prophetic messages.
- They re-built the Temple and the walls and gates of Jerusalem in preparation for Messiah.
- They were awaiting the coming of Messiah to Jerusalem.
- They ‘trembled at the word of God’ (Ezra 9:3)
- Yet they fell into disobedience even though they had left Babylon.

How is it with us today?

- We call ourselves the remnant that has answered the call to come out of Babylon.
- We are a prophetic people.
- The Temple and its services were to demonstrate the gospel of Jesus. We are to restore the pure gospel to the world today.

- Praise (the gates), salvation and separation from the ways of the world (the walls) are the hallmarks for God's people in the end-time.
- We are waiting for Christ to come in glory.
- We call ourselves the people of the Word and pride ourselves that we keep God's commandments.
- Are we truly faithful to our calling – living in perfect and continuous obedience to the will of God? Or are we disobedient to God's will?

*“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” Luke 18:8*

God's Word reveals His perfect will to us. How do we respond? Do we use our intellect and reason to make excuses for disobedience? Or do we obey without question, because we 'seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness'? (Matthew 6:33)

'Scriptural difficulties can never be mastered by the same methods that are employed in grappling with philosophical problems... One reason why many have no clearer understanding of God's word is, they close their eyes to truths which they do not wish to practice. As understanding of Bible truth depends not so much on the power of intellect brought to the search as on the singleness of purpose, the earnest longing after righteousness.' *Great Controversy: p 599*

It is possible to be so brilliant, so educated, and so sophisticated that we think our opinion is worth something in terms of truth. Our opinion is worth nothing in terms of truth. God has revealed His truth, and we must all find it and accept it and know it for ourselves. *Morris Venden: God Says, but I Think.*

*They were bought from earth, lived without compromise, virgin-fresh before God. Wherever the Lamb went, they followed. They were bought from humankind, first-fruits of the harvest for God and the Lamb. Not a false word in their mouths. A perfect offering. Revelation 14:4, 5 (The Message)*

-----