

CHAPTER 10

In this chapter we have that grievance redressed which was complained of and lamented in the foregoing chapter. Observe,

- I.** How the people's hearts were prepared for the redress of it by their deep humiliation for the sin (v. 1).
- II.** How it was proposed to Ezra by Shechaniah (v. 2-4).
- III.** How the proposal was put in execution.
 - 1.** The great men were sworn to stand to it (v. 5).
 - 2.** Ezra appeared first in it (v. 6).
 - 3.** A general assembly was called (v. 7-9).
 - 4.** They all, in compliance with Ezra's exhortation, agreed to the reformation (v. 10-14).
 - 5.** Commissioners were appointed to sit "de die in diem" — day after day, to enquire who had married strange wives and to oblige them to put them away, which was done accordingly (v. 15-17). and a list of the names of those that were found guilty given in (v. 18-44).

~~5101~~ EZRA 10:1-5

EZRA'S REFORMATION

We are here told,

I. What good impressions were made upon the people by Ezra's humiliation and confession of sin. No sooner was it noised in the city that their new governor, in whom they rejoiced, was himself in grief, and to so great a degree, for them and their sin, than presently there *assembled to him a very great congregation*, to see what the matter was and to mingle their tears with his, v. 1. Our weeping for other people's sins may perhaps set those a weeping for them themselves who otherwise would continue senseless and remorseless. See what a happy influence the good examples of great ones may have upon their inferiors. When Ezra, a scribe, a scholar, a man in authority under the king, so deeply lamented the public corruptions, they concluded that they were indeed very grievous, else he

would not thus have grieved for them; and this drew tears from every eye: *men, women, and children, wept very sore*, when he wept thus.

II. What a good motion Shechaniah made upon this occasion. The place was *Bochim* — a place of *weepers*; but, for aught that appears, there was a profound silence among them, as among Job's friends, who *spoke not a word to him, because they saw that his grief was very great*, till Shechaniah (one of Ezra's companions from Babylon, ^{<STR>}Ezra 8:3, 5) stood up, and made a speech addressed to Ezra, in which,

1. He owns the national guilt, sums up all Ezra's confession in one word, and sets to his seal that it is true: "*We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives*, v. 2. The matter is too plain to be denied and too bad to be excused." It does not appear that Shechaniah was himself culpable in this matter (if he had had the beam in his own eye, he could not have seen so clearly to pluck it out of his brother's eye), but his father was guilty, and several of his father's house (as appears v. 26), and therefore he reckons himself among the trespassers; nor does he seek to excuse or palliate the sin, though some of his own relations were guilty of it, but, in the cause of God, *says to his father, I have not known him*, as Levi, ^{<STR>}Deuteronomy 33:9. Perhaps the strange wife that his father had married had been an unjust unkind step-mother to him, and had made mischief in the family, and he supposed that others had done the like, which made him the more forward to appear against this corruption; if so, this was not the only time that private resentments have been over ruled by the providence of God to serve the public good.

2. He encourages himself and others to hope that though the matter was bad it might be amended: *Yet now there is hope in Israel* (where else should there be hope but in Israel? those that are strangers to that commonwealth are said to have *no hope*, ^{<STR>}Ephesians 2:12) even *concerning this thing*. The case is sad, but it is not desperate; the disease is threatening, but not incurable. There is hope that the people may be reformed, the guilty reclaimed, a stop put to the spreading of the contagion; and so the judgments which the sin deserves may be prevented and all will be well. *Now there is hope*; now that the disease is discovered it is half-cured. Now that the alarm is taken the people begin to be sensible of the mischief, and to lament it, a spirit of repentance seems to be poured out upon them, and they are all thus humbling themselves before God for it, *now there is hope* that God will forgive, and have mercy. The *valley of*

Achor (that is, of *trouble*) is the *door of hope* (~~<3015>~~Hosea 2:15); for the sin that truly troubles us shall not ruin us. There is hope now that Israel has such a prudent, pious, zealous governor as Ezra to manage this affair.

Note,

- (1.) In melancholy times we must see and observe what makes for us, as well as what makes against us.
 - (2.) There may be good hopes through grace, even when there is the sense of great guilt before God.
 - (3.) Where sin is seen and lamented, and good steps are taken towards a reformation, even sinners ought to be encouraged.
 - (4.) Even great saints must thankfully receive seasonable counsel and comfort from those that are much their inferiors, as Ezra from Shechaniah.
3. He advises that a speedy and effectual course should be taken for the divorcing of the strange wives. The case is plain; what has been done amiss must be undone again as far as possible; nothing less than this is true repentance. *Let us put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, v. 3.* Ezra, though he knew this was the only way of redressing the grievance, yet perhaps did not think it feasible, and despaired of ever bringing the people to it, which put him into that confusion in which we left him in the foregoing chapter; but Shechaniah, who conversed more with the people than he did, assured him the thing was practicable if they went wisely to work. As to us now, it is certain that sin must be put away, a bill of divorce must be given it, with a resolution never to have any thing more to do with it, though it be dear as the wife of thy bosom, nay, as a right eye or a right hand, otherwise there is no pardon, no peace. What has been unjustly got cannot be justly kept, but must be restored; but, as to the case of being *unequally yoked with unbelievers*, Shechaniah's counsel, which he was then so clear in, will not hold now; such marriages, it is certain, are sinful, and ought not to be made, but they are not null. *Quod fieri non debuit, factum valet* — *That which ought not to have been done must, when done, abide.* Our rule, under the gospel, is, *If a brother has a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away,* ~~<41712>~~1 Corinthians 7:12, 13.

4. He puts them in a good method for the effecting of this reformation, and shows them not only that it must be done, but how.

(1.) “Let Ezra, and all those that are present in this assembly, agree in a resolution that this must be done (pass a vote immediately to this effect: it will now pass *nemine contradicente* — *unanimously*), that it may be said to be done *according to the counsel of my lord*, the president of the assembly, with the unanimous concurrence of those that *tremble at the commandment of our God*, which is the description of those that were gathered to him, ^{<15104>}Ezra 9:4. Declare it to be the sense of all the sober serious people among us, which cannot but have a great sway among Israelites.”

(2.) “Let the command of God in this matter, which Ezra recited in his prayer, be laid before the people, and let them see that it is *done according to the law*; we have that to warrant us, nay, that binds us to what we do; it is not an addition of our own to the divine law, but the necessary execution of it.”

(3.) “While we are in a good mind, let us bind ourselves by a solemn vow and covenant that we will do it, lest, when the present impressions are worn off, the thing be left undone. Let us covenant, not only that, if we have strange wives ourselves, we will put them away, but that, if we have not, we will do what we can in our places to oblige others to put away theirs.”

(4.) “Let Ezra himself preside in this matter, who is authorized by the king’s commission to enquire whether the law of God be duly observed in Judah and Jerusalem (^{<15174>}Ezra 7:14), and let us all resolve to stand by him in it (v. 4): *Arise, be of good courage*. Weeping, in this case, is good, but reforming is better.” See what God said to Joshua in a like case, ^{<16710>}Joshua 7:10, 11.

III. What a good resolution they came to upon this good motion, v. 5. They not only agreed that it should be done, but bound themselves with an oath that they would do according to this word. Fast bind, fast find.

<1506>EZRA 10:6-14

EZRA'S REFORMATION

We have here an account of the proceedings upon the resolutions lately taken up concerning the strange wives; no time was lost; they struck when the iron was hot, and soon set the wheels of reformation a-going.

- 1.** Ezra went to the council-chamber where, it is probable, the priests used to meet upon public business; *and till he came thither* (so bishop Patrick thinks it should be read), till he saw something done, and more likely to be done, for the redress of this grievance, *he did neither eat nor drink*, but continued mourning. Sorrow for sin should be abiding sorrow; be sure to let it continue till the sin be put away.
- 2.** He sent orders to all the children of the captivity to attend him at Jerusalem *within three days* (v. 7, 8); and, being authorized by the king to enforce his orders with penalties annexed (<15725>Ezra 7:26), he threatened that whosoever refused to obey the summons should forfeit his estate and be outlawed. The doom of him that would not attend on this religious occasion should be that his substance should, in his stead, be for ever after appropriated to the service of their religion, and he himself, for his contempt, should for ever after be excluded from the honours and privileges of their religion; he should be excommunicated.
- 3.** Within the time limited the generality of the people met at Jerusalem and made their appearance *in the street of the house of God*, v. 9. Those that had no zeal for the work they were called to, nay, perhaps had a dislike to it, being themselves delinquents, yet paid such a deference to Ezra's authority, and were so awed by the penalty, that they durst not stay away.
- 4.** God gave them a token of his displeasure in the great rain that happened at that time (v. 9 and again 5:13), which perhaps kept some away, and was very grievous to those that met in the open street. When they wept the heavens wept too, signifying that, though God was angry with them for their sin, yet he was well pleased with their repentance, and (as it is said, <17016>Judges 10:16) *his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel*; it was also an indication of the good fruits of their repentance, for the rain makes the earth fruitful.

5. Ezra gave the charge at this great assize. He told them upon what account he called them together now, that it was because he found that since their return out of captivity they had *increased the trespass of Israel* by *marrying strange wives*, had added to their former sins this new transgression, which would certainly be a means of again introducing idolatry, the very sin they had smarted for and which he hoped they had been cured of in their captivity; and he called them together that they might *confess their sin to God*, and, having done that, might declare themselves ready and willing to do his pleasure, as it should be made known to them (which all those will do that truly repent of what they have done to incur his displeasure), and particularly that they might separate themselves from all idolaters, especially idolatrous wives, v. 10, 11. On these heads, we may suppose, he enlarged, and probably made such another confession of the sin now as he made Ezra 9, to which he required them to say *Amen*.

6. The people submitted not only to Ezra's jurisdiction in general, but to his inquisition and determination in this matter: "*As thou hast said, so must we do*, v. 12. We have sinned in mingling with the heathen, and have thereby been in danger, not only of being corrupted by them, for we are frail, but of being lost among them, for we are few; we are therefore convinced that there is an absolute necessity of our separating from them again." There is hope concerning people when they are convinced, not only that it is good to part with their sins, but that it is indispensably necessary: we must do it, or we are undone.

7. It was agreed that this affair should be carried on, not in a popular assembly, nor that they should think to go through with it all on a sudden, but that a court of delegates should be appointed to receive complaints and to hear and determine upon them. It could not be done at this time, for it was not put into a method, nor could the people stand out because of the rain. The delinquents were many, and it would require time to discover and examine them. Nice cases would arise, which could not be adjudged without debate and deliberation, v. 13. "And therefore let the crowd be dismissed, and the rulers stand to receive informations; let them proceed city by city, and let the offenders be convicted before them in the presence of the judges and elders of their own city; and let them be entrusted to see the orders executed. Thus *take time and we shall have done the sooner*; whereas, if we do it in a hurry, we shall do it by halves, v. 14. If, in this method, a thorough reformation be made, the *fierce wrath of God* will be *turned from us*, which, we are sensible, is ready to break forth against us

for this transgression.” Ezra was willing that his zeal should be guided by the people's prudence, and put the matter into this method; he was not ashamed to own that the advice came from them, any more than he was to comply with it.

<500> EZRA 10:15-44

EZRA'S REFORMATION

The method of proceeding in this matter being concluded on, and the congregation dismissed, that each in his respective place might gain and give intelligence to facilitate the matter, we are here told,

- 1.** Who were the persons that undertook to manage the matter and bring the causes regularly before the commissioners — *Jonathan* and *Jahaziah*, two active men, whether of the priests or of the people does not appear; probably they were the men that made that proposal (v. 13, 14) and were therefore the fittest to see it pursued; two honest Levites were joined with them, and *helped them*, v. 15. Dr. Lightfoot gives a contrary sense of this: *only* (or *nevertheless*) *Jonathan and Jahaziah stood against this matter* (which reading the original will very well bear), and these two *Levites helped them* in opposing it, either the thing itself or this method of proceeding. It was strange if a work of this kind was carried on and met with no opposition.
- 2.** Who were the commissioners that sat upon this matter. Ezra was president, and with him *certain chief men of the fathers* who were qualified with wisdom and zeal above others for this service, v. 16. It was happy for them that they had such a man as Ezra to head them; they could not have done it well without his direction, yet he would not do it without their concurrence.
- 3.** How long they were about it. They began *the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter* (v. 16), which was but ten days after this method was proposed (v. 9), and they finished in three months, v. 17. They sat closely and minded their business, otherwise they could not have despatched so many causes as they had before them in so little time; for we may suppose that all who were impeached were fairly asked what cause they could show why they should not be parted, and, if we may judge by

other cases, provided the wife were proselyted to the Jewish religion she was not to be put away, the trial of which would require great care.

4. Who the persons were that were found guilty of this crime. Their names are here recorded to their perpetual reproach; many of the priests, nay, of the family of Jeshua, the high priest, were found guilty (v. 18), though the law had particularly provided, for the preserving of their honour in their marriages, that being holy themselves they should not marry such as were profane, ^{<R207>}Leviticus 21:7. Those that should have taught others the law broke it themselves and by their example emboldened others to do likewise. But, having lost their innocency in this matter, they did well to recant and give an example of repentance; for they promised *under their hand* to put away their strange wives (some think that they made oath to do so with their *hands lifted up*), and they took the appointed way of obtaining pardon, bringing the ram which was appointed by the law *for a trespass offering* (^{<R106>}Leviticus 6:6), so owning their guilt and the desert of it, and humbly suing for forgiveness. About 113 in all are here named who had married strange wives, and some of them, it is said (v. 44), had children by them, which implies that not many of them had, God not crowning those marriages with the blessing of increase. Whether the children were turned off with the mothers, as Shechaniah proposed, does not appear; it should seem not: however it is probable that the wives which were put away were well provided for, according to their rank. One would think this grievance was now thoroughly redressed, yet we meet with it again (^{<4633>}Nehemiah 13:23 and ^{<3021>}Malachi 2:11), for such corruptions are easily and insensibly brought in, but not without great difficulty purged out again. The best reformers can but do their endeavour, but, when the Redeemer himself shall *come to Sion*, he shall effectually *turn away ungodliness from Jacob*.