

The People Confess Their Sin

Ezra 10:1-17

MEMORY VERSE

EZRA 10:11

“Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land...”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Two potatoes or other objects easily passed around.

Yellow and gray construction paper, glue, markers or crayons, and glitter.

ATTENTION GRABBER!

Rip Van Winkle

The people and leaders of Israel had fallen asleep. They were asleep to God’s Word and asleep to their sin. Though God had shown great mercy to them in returning them to their own land and enabling them to rebuild the House of God; they soon forgot the law of God. God used Ezra to wake them up! Sometimes, we can fall asleep spiritually. When we do not pay attention to our relationship with the Lord, problems may begin to happen in our lives. Recount the story of Rip Van Winkle who was a young man who fell asleep under a tree. He woke up 100 years later and discovered that everything had changed around him, including himself.

Find a volunteer to be “it.” Have them stand at the front of the room facing away from the class. Turn off the light (the volunteer can make sleeping noises if they like). While the light is off have two or three children change places or change jackets or other minor changes (you can notify some of the children before class

about what you plan to do). Turn the light back on and ask the volunteer to tell what changed. Pick another one or two children to play.

Reinforce with the children that things can change in our lives if we are asleep spiritually.

LESSON TIME!

When God called the nation of Israel, He said that they would be a “peculiar” or different people--different from all of the other nations in the world. The true and living God would be their God, and He would bless them.

We, too, as Christians must be separate, different, from those in the world. In 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul exhorts, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” Paul continues in verse 17 and 18 with a reminder of God’s Word to the children of Israel, “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.” **God wants us to be separate from the world.**

About eighty years had past since the people of Judah had returned from their captivity. Not all, however, had returned from Babylon; many had remained. Ezra, “a skilled scribe in the law of Moses,” with the permission and blessing of King Artaxerxes, led another small group of the people of Judah from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Ezra was a godly man. The Bible says Ezra “prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.” When he returned to Jerusalem, his heart was broken; for the people had once more forsaken God’s law. They had not remained a “separate” people.

EZRA 10:1-4

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.

"Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it."

Sin brings sorrow and pain. Ezra was at the temple—praying and weeping over the sins of the nation. He returned to Jerusalem to find that the people had married wives from the nations around them. God had prohibited such a practice. For, these wives did not worship the true God; they worshiped the gods of the nations around them. Such a move represented great danger to the nation. Once more, Israel could become a nation filled with idolatry. It broke his heart to see God’s people freely sin, ignoring God’s law.

While Ezra prayed, a large crowd gathered together around him, weeping. It seems his broken and astonished heart spoke more to the people than any sermon he could have preached. Reminded of God's law and the seriousness of their sin, their hearts were saddened. A man by the name of Shechaniah spoke up and confessed before everyone that the nation had sinned against God. In the midst of the sorrow, Shechaniah displays his heartfelt awareness of God's mercy and grace, "There is hope in Israel in spite of this."

EZRA 10:5-8

Then Ezra arose, and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So they swore an oath.

Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and when he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity.

And they issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the descendants of the captivity, that they must gather at Jerusalem,

and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the instructions of the leaders and elders, all his property would be confiscated, and he himself would be separated from the assembly of those from the captivity.

The people were now ready to serve the Lord and do what is right. Ezra, in response to Shechaniah's advice, called together the leaders of the people to take an oath to obey the Lord. He issued a proclamation throughout the nation that all the people were to gather in Jerusalem—every man, woman, and child was to come to Jerusalem.

Hot Potatoes

Shechaniah had the right thing to say at the right time, and God used him! The object of this game is to not be caught with the hot potato in your hand. You will need 2 potatoes or other objects that can be passed around.

Have everyone sit in a circle. Give out the two potatoes. Play the music while the children pass around the two potatoes. Have one potato go to the left and one potato go to the right. Stop the music, the one holding the potato sits outside of the circle. Start over until only two remain. Play again.

When you are done, remind the children that God chooses us to do great things for Him. We need to be ready and willing when we are chosen and given a job to do by the Lord.

EZRA 10:9-15

So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth of the month; and all the people sat in the open square of the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of heavy rain.

Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel.

"Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives."

Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, "Yes! As you have said, so we must do."

"But there are many people; it is the season for heavy rain, and we are not able to stand outside. Nor is this the work of one or two days, for there are many of us who have transgressed in this matter."

"Please, let the leaders of our entire assembly stand; and let all those in our cities who have taken pagan wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and judges of their cities, until the fierce wrath of our God is turned away from us in this matter."

Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite gave them support.

All of the people gathered together in Jerusalem. Ezra, standing before them, declared to the people their sin and admonished them to confess their sin, ask God's forgiveness, and separate themselves from the "people of the land, and from the pagan wives."

As God's children, we too, when guilty, should confess our sins, ask God's forgiveness, and *do* what God requires. The people were to "separate themselves." We also must separate ourselves from the world and its ways. Though we must be *in* the world, we are not to be *of* the world. Beware of the danger of "hanging around" too comfortably with worldly friends. It is all too easy to let the ways

of the world rub off on us! We are to love unbelievers, but not become like them. **God wants us to be separate from the world.**

EZRA 10:16-17

Then the descendants of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain heads of the fathers' households, were set apart by the fathers' households, each of them by name; and they sat down on the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter.

By the first day of the first month they finished questioning all the men who had taken pagan wives.

The people confessed their sin and turned from their sin to obey God. It must not have been easy for the people, yet this action was necessary, and they obeyed the Lord. The Bible says, "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted..." (2 Corinthians 7:10). From that time on, Israel was cured of its idol worship.

In Ezra 9:12, Ezra remembers God's Word in his prayer for the people.

Now therefore, do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons; and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your children forever.

God's desire was that His people be strong, be blessed, and that His blessing might extend to their posterity (their children and grandchildren). Therefore, it was important that they remain "separate" from the people of the land who would surely lead them into idolatry. **God wants us to be separate from the world.**

Have you ever wondered why there are rules? or maybe, why we should do the things written in the Bible? It is because God knows everything about us. He created us; He knows how we should live. He gives us His Word to help us to live a happy life. When we obey and follow God's Word, we will be blessed. If we choose to sin and disobey, we will have problems, just as the people of Judah did. May we commit to obey the Lord!

Stay in the Light

The world is full of darkness. We need to stay close to the light of God's Word and be separated from this world. As a reminder of this have the children make a light bulb and put the memory verse in the center.

You will need yellow and gray construction paper, glue, markers or crayons, and glitter. Using yellow construction paper, have the children cut out light bulb shapes (approximately 6 inches). Next, have them cut out small gray squares for the base of the light bulb. Have the children write the memory verse in the center of the light bulb. As an option, use glitter to make the light bulb look shiny.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to remain separate from the world. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity.