



**Module** : Fasting

**Session 8** : Apostolic-Prophetic Prayer and Fasting #3

**Focus** : Principles of Prayerful Fasting from Ezra – Part 2

This study is a continuation of the case study explored in our previous session, in which we examined principles relative to Ezra's proclaimed fast for the exiles who returned with him to Jerusalem. This fast was not just for physical protection on a long and dangerous journey. It includes this, but the fast was really to preserve the scribal grace and all that was locked within it as represented by Ezra himself. Ezra also fasted a second time when he became appalled at the degree to which God's people had violated God's Word, especially in respect to the issue of inter-marriage.

### **NATIONAL REPENTANCE AND REFORMATION IN RELATIONSHIPS LED BY EZRA WITH DEEP HUMILITY**

#### **Ezra 9:1-5 (ESV)**

- 1 After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites **have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands** with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.
- 2 For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the **holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost.**"
- 3 As soon as I heard this, I **tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled.**
- 4 Then **all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel,** because of the **faithlessness** of the returned exiles, gathered around me **while I sat appalled** until the evening sacrifice.
- 5 And at the evening sacrifice **I rose from my fasting,** with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out **my hands to the Lord my God.** (ESV)

In Ezra 9, Ezra discovers that the nation had not observed God's law concerning marriage with foreign nations and that this 'unfaithfulness' was mostly practiced and led by the rulers of the people, thus encouraging its widespread practice in the nation. The sins of leaders have more serious ramifications than those who they lead. This is so because of the representational principle embedded within leadership. Leaders are gateways either for great blessing or great proneness to err in their people. In the repentance of the nation of the issue of inter-marriage, the leaders, as representational of the rest of the people, were foremost in their repentance and humility before God.

**Ezra 10:14** **Let our leaders represent the whole assembly** and let all those in our cities who have married foreign wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and judges of each city, until the fierce anger of our God on account of this matter is turned away from us.

**The sheer extent of inter-marriage ‘appalled’ Ezra and he humbled himself with fasting in an attitude of deep repentance. A certain group of people who had deep reverence and esteem for God’s Word also joined him. We need to maintain our love for, respect and honour for God’s principles – we need to ‘tremble at His Word’.** To the man who highly esteems and obeys God’s speaking, God has promised to make that man His final dwelling place (See **John 14:21-23**).

**Isaiah 66:1-2**

- 1 Thus says the Lord, “Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And **where is a place that I may rest?**
- 2 “For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being,” declares the Lord. “But to this one **I will look**, To him who is **humble and contrite of spirit**, and who **trembles at My word**.

The breach of God’s Word in inter-marriage goes way back to the days of Solomon when he breached the command of God in several respects. As King, he was clearly instructed concerning this matter. Here are a set of rules every newly installed king had to observe – and so would Solomon also would have had to observe.

**Deut. 17:16-20**

“When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,’ you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman. Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the Lord has said to you, ‘You shall never again return that way.’ **He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself.**

“Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write **for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests**. It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he **may learn to fear the Lord his God**, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that **he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left**, so that **he and his sons** may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.”

**Solomon sins.**

**1 Kings 11:1-10**

Now King Solomon **loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel, “You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods.”** Solomon held fast to these in love. He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away. For when Solomon was old, **his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.** For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites. Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not follow the Lord fully, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. **Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.** Now the Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had **APPEARED TO HIM TWICE**, and **had commanded him concerning this thing**, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the Lord had commanded.

## THE ISSUE OF INTER-MARRIAGE

The issue of a son of God marrying someone who does not serve God and who has not accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, is common place today. This is not a light issue. Time and space do not permit me to address it here, but suffice it to say for now, that we need our young (and older) people in our churches marrying others who love God, who serve Him with their whole hearts and are dedicated to His purposes in their lives. We are not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Our people must marry accurately. When Rebekah considered the possibility of her son Jacob marrying inaccurately, she considered the consequence of such a decision as equated to her being seriously sick – even akin to death.

**Gen. 27:46** Rebekah said to Isaac, “**I am tired of living** (*KJV: I am weary of my life*) because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth, like these, from the daughters of the land, **what good will my life be to me?**”

**Tired/weary** = **qus** = loathe, to be disgusted, to be sick of; revulsed to the point of vomiting.

**Gen. 28:1** So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and **CHARGED** him, and said to him, **“YOU SHALL NOT** take a wife from the daughters of Canaan.”

**Charge** = **sawah** = Order, direct, command; The setting forth of a rule or principle (Alludes to INSCRIBING a law as a warning system within him).

**JACOB OBEYS : Gen. 28:7** Jacob had **obeyed his father and his mother.**

**Obey** = **shamah** = To listen sensing the urgency in the sound of the voice;  
To make a just decision.

## A DIVINE CAUTION ON DISOBEDIENCE

**ESAU DISOBEYS :** **Gen. 28:8,9** So Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father Isaac; and Esau went to Ishmael, and married, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, the sister of Nebaioth.

Do not enter into inaccurate relationships because of offence, jealousy, or to bring disappointment, agitation and discontentment to the spiritual father who cautions you in these matters.

**Heb. 12:15,16** See to it that no one **comes short of the grace of God**; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be **no immoral** (*KJV: fornicator*) **or godless person like Esau**, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.

Esau treated his birthright with contempt. The Scriptures say that he despised his birthright and traded it for the temporal gratification of his fleshly appetite. Every time we give into sensual and fleshly satisfaction that is a violation of God’s clear command, we show disdain for the weightedness and import of our prophetic promises and inheritance in God. When Esau did this, it set him up to be easily drawn into relationships which would further push him away from God’s ordained path for him. Active and intense focus on your prophetic destiny will help you to determine who you allow to enter into close and intimate relationships with you.

Those that do not have a significant bearing on your ultimate calling in God are those whom you should not allow intimate access to your heart.

Esau is described as a fornicator or immoral person.

**Immoral / fornicator = Pórnos** = a whoremonger or male prostitute.

Fornication includes engagement in sexual activity outside of the bounds prescribed by God. Within the context of marriage, sex is holy and a celebration of covenant of strong joining between a husband and wife. To fornicate is to engage in the sexual act in terms of abusing something, which was intended to be a physical act depicting the deep and intimate love and serious commitment between two people.

**I feel the strong caution of the Lord** that the pursuit of wrong relationships, which are not ordained by the Lord, in this season, will culminate in expressions of sexual sin and fornication. **This is simply a prophetic impression** that we need to heed.

Be careful that because you fail to highly esteem the will and destiny that God has for you, that you are seduced into pursuing or accommodating specific relationships that are not 'covenantal' and based on true commitment. If you do so, you open yourself up to satanic oppression and infiltration that is sexually based. This may express itself in things like a strong allurements toward pornography or engagement in ungodly sexual fantasy. I would strongly urge everyone to examine the fruit or result of some relationships and the effect that this has on you in terms of things. I just sense that if these things are the result of the specific relationships you have pursued, then these relationships need to be wisely terminated.

What is really concerning is that Hebrews 12:15,16 quoted above, links the fact that Esau fornicated (i.e. he entered sexually into un-covenanted relationships with the intent of physical gratification), with **the fact that he came short of the grace of God**. Grace is your Divine empowerment to be successful in the will of God for your life. Inaccurate joinings can cause you to come short or function beneath the allotment of grace that God has afforded and determined you.

Do your present relationships amplify and accentuate the grace that God has given you? Those relationships that do, must be nurtured, developed, highly esteemed and treated as sacred – as God-ordained.

### **SYMBOLIC APPLICATION OF THE SIN OF INTER-MARRIAGE**

On another level, the imagery of marriage is symbolic of a strong covenantal joining or alliance with a specific principle of belief system. All the nations mentioned, whose women the men of Israel married, indicate certain ideologies that are antagonistic to the ways of God. **For Example ... :**

**Ammonites** : Ammon = '**tribal**' and alludes to a spirit of democracy where the rule or desire of the majority persist. It also highlights the placing of your brothers' counsel above that of your fathers' – this is wrong.

**Moabites** : Moab, amongst other things, means '**What Father?**'.  
This spirit despises the need for spiritual father/patriarchy.

**Canaanites** : Canaan = **Merchant, Trader, Trafficker.**

Alludes to those ruled and control by the spirit of Mammon (greed, materialism, etc). It also indicates the sin of Canaan who uncovered his father Noah's nakedness – speaks of disrespect and dishonouring of spiritual fathers, inciting the exposure of their weakness in a deriding, scoffing manner – without genuine concern for them and their redemption.

*(Note: Canaan is Noah's grandson, a son of Ham, Noah's youngest son. Scripture records that Ham uncovered Noah's nakedness, but Canaan is cursed by Noah for this sin. Varied theories surrounding why Canaan is cursed and not Ham directly, abound. Many theologians believe that Canaan was somehow involved in this sin, hence the curse. However, it cannot be conclusively proven. Ham had four sons, yet Canaan is the only one directly cursed. In this study, we picture Canaan as being culpable for the sin too, hence the judgement on his life. Again this is pure inference and cannot be argued as fact.)*

**Hittites** : (Same as 'Heth'); Hittite = **Annoyance, Dread and Fear.**

This speaks to those who operate by intimidation, exploitation and fear tactics.

**Perezites** : Perezites = **Villagers; Open; Without Walls; Rustic; Squatter.**

This alludes to those without walls – whose disobedience makes them vulnerable to enemy attack; also those with no fixedness and sense of permanency – always meandering/wandering and never settling. They have a village mentality – smallness of mind – not embracing the corporate Kingdom agenda or larger global mandate.

**Egyptians** : Egyptian = **An oppressor; Double straits.**

Speaks of a spirit that brings bondage such that there is mis-alignment of purpose and the eroding of true sonship identity.

**Jebusites** : Jebus = **Treading down; a place trodden down.**

The Jebusites were descendants of Canaan. They were not defeated in Joshua's conquest of the land. David routed them from Jerusalem when he came to set up his kingship there. They represent a dishonouring spirit toward spiritual fathering that has matured. They mocked David years before. They are people trodden down and who forever live defeated and substandard lives because dishonour has begun to saturate their lives.

**Amorites** : Amorite = **Mountaineer; A talker; A slayer.**

This denotes those who 'slay' others with their negative, carnal and judgemental speech that is rooted in elevated pride and arrogance.

All of the above represent spirits to which we must not be covenantally joined. God is calling for a separation from these spirits. We cannot be intimate with people who embody any of the above. We are to love them but cannot walk closely with them. There is coming a reformation of relationships and a re-socialisation of the Body of Christ.

In Ezra 9:6-15 Ezra prays a prayer of deep repentance before the Lord. By the end of his prayer, a very large company of people had gathered unto him. He was encouraged by the official to take steps to give advice and counsel concerning how to rectify the matter of the sin of inter-marriage with foreign heathen nations.

### EZRA'S PRAYERFUL FASTING LEADS TO STRATEGIC ACTION

#### Ezra 10:1-4

Now while Ezra was **praying and making confession**, weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God, a very large assembly, men, women and children, gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept bitterly. Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, said to Ezra, "We have been unfaithful to our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. So now **let us make a covenant with our God** to put away all the wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord 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, but we will be with you; be courageous and act.**

There was serious transgression of the principles of God in the nation. Specifically, inter-marriage was strongly condemned and the nation was brought back to God's order in the matter of marriage. Inter-marriage was prohibited because God wanted to preserve the purity of the Divine seed which would bear His image. This too, must be preserved today. Inaccurate covenantal joinings must cease. Purity of spirit and purity in relationships is to be restored. Ezra administered the divorce of men who had married foreign wives. This for the couples involved must have been a most painful and difficult thing to do on an emotional level. **But it was not an emotional decision that was being made, but a principled decision.** Guiding your teenagers not to court members of the opposite sex who are not serving God is not an emotional issue but a principled issue. They may have strong feelings, but feelings never decide the rightness of behaviour in the Kingdom of God – only biblically acceptable principles do. As leaders and parents, we like Ezra must take a stand and advise our young people/ young adults of the seriousness of inaccurate courtships and marriages. "Arise! For this matter is your responsibility!" (Ezra 10:4).

I sense prophetically, that as Ezra was encouraged to ... **"Arise! For this matter is your responsibility, but we will be with you; be courageous and act"** ... that God is calling many today to be bold and courageous when He leads you to address expressions of inaccurate thought or behaviour that would serve to abort God's long term purposes attendant with another person, family, group or church. Arise! For this matter is your responsibility. As there was great support for Ezra by others, so too will God raise up others in support of you. Like Nehemiah was burdened by the state of Jerusalem, you will be burdened by a specific concern, and **the area in which you feel burdened is usually the area God desires to use you personally to bring resolution. Your work begins with strong prayer and fasting.**

### IMPORTANT THINGS TO NOTE :

- **Dissenting Individuals:** Ezra was bold and daring in his rectifying of the issue of inter-marriage. Although receiving opposition from four individuals, he nevertheless administered the matter with wisdom, being led of God.

#### Ezra 10:15,16

Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah **opposed this**, with Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite supporting them. **But the exiles did so.** And Ezra the priest selected men who were heads of fathers' households for each of their father's households, all of them by name. So they convened on the first day of the tenth month to investigate the matter.

I sense prophetically that we are in a season in which God is requiring corporate cleansing of His house. Non-compliance from specific individuals must not impede this process. Those who dissent and are non-cooperative with the demands God is placing upon us now, will suffer the consequences of their own rebellion.

- **Urgency and Quickness to Obey**: The men were given only three days to respond to a call from Ezra to gather so that he could direct them. There was to be no 'delay' in attending to the matter at hand. Those who delayed suffered dispossession of property and from being numbered among the assembly of God's people. Indifference and unrepentance was not to slow the process down.

**Ezra 10:7** They made a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the exiles, that they should assemble at Jerusalem, and that whoever **would not come within three days**, according to the counsel of the leaders and the elders, all his possessions should be forfeited and he himself excluded from the assembly of the exiles.

- **Specificity of God's Dealings**: In Ezra chapter 10 from verse 18 to 42, is a long list of the leading men guilty of inter-marriage. This list seems like a waste of time and space, so why is it there? I believe the Lord recorded the details of the offenders names to indicate that He would be very personal and specific in dealing with the matter of impurity in His house in the present season. No one would be excluded from the very personal and probing refining intervention of God today. This is akin to Achan being sniffed out as the guilty party for hiding things in his tent, things he was not supposed to have touched (See Joshua 7 and 8). Today, you cannot even hide amidst the corporateness of a large group. A detailed forensic fine-tunement of God's church is afoot.

#### **GRACE HAS BEEN AFFORDED:**

**Ezra 9:8** But now for a brief moment **grace has been shown from the Lord our God**, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God **may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage**.

Ezra and Nehemiah dealt with longstanding breaches in the nation. There was a departure from God's timeless and righteous principles. But GRACE had been afforded to them – an opportunity in which to correct the mistakes of the past and heal the breach. In a season of great grace, there must be an immediate response of the people to the expectation and demand of God in that time. May I implore you that whenever you sense the leading of the Lord for you to fast for the reasons cited in this study, that you respond with immediacy and urgency, for if you delay or defer, you forgo a wonderful opportunity whereby God downloads unparalleled grace to bring you and your family to a place of restoration to His principles, plans and purposes.

**Psalms 27:7-9** Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice, And **BE GRACIOUS** to me and answer me. When **YOU SAID**, "Seek My face," **MY HEART SAID** to You. "Your face, O Lord, I shall seek." Do not hide Your face from me, Do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; Do not abandon me nor forsake me.

Here is the **NLT version of Ezra 9:8**: "But now we have been given a brief moment of grace ... Our God has **brightened our eyes and granted us some relief from our slavery**".

Trust me – there will come **brightness of eye** and a relief from longstanding slavery in your life and that of your family!

## **CONCLUSION**

As God heard the cry of Ezra on both occasions of his fast, so too will He hear yours. As you fast to fuel your passionate desire to INSCRIBE God's law indelibly upon the tablets of your heart, it will be an inviolable principle by which you function. Also coupled with this, as you fast in a spirit of repentance when you see the state of the church so filled with mixture of varied ideologies that are intended to neutralise its effect, may God hear your prayers too. May He use you also to bring restoration and reformation to His church.

### **Consider this Verse in Your Meditation:**

**1 Chron 5:20** They were helped against them, and the Hagarites and all who were with them were given into their hand; for **they cried out to God in the battle, and He answered their prayers because they trusted in Him.**

Consider the passage below in this regard.

### **2 Chron. 33:10-13**

- 10 The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but **they paid no attention.**
- 11 Therefore the Lord brought the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria against them, and they captured Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze chains and took him to Babylon.
- 12 **When he was in distress, he entreated the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.**
- 13 **When he prayed to Him, He was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God.**

**Is God MOVED BY YOUR PRAYER in humility with FASTING?** God was moved by the degree of humility and sincerity of Manasseh in his prayer.

Recall that fasting is a means of self-humbling. Ezra and the people humbled themselves and sought God by prayer and fasting. There is no place for self-centred or self-righteous pride when fasting. Ezra as a type, along with Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, are indicative and representative of a 'reformational' restorative process for Jerusalem. Things gone wrong historically were being addressed and brought back to order.

May I encourage you, for your personal life or family, that even if you, through disobedience, are beset by certain results you have to bear, that if you return to the Lord with prayerful fasting in deep, sincere repentance and humility, that God will respond with great mercy, grace, kindness and preservation for you too. Ezra's reformational efforts were built upon a heart intensely burdened by deep concern for God's glory being accurately portrayed in Israel. This heart was immersed in fasting and prayer for the spiritual depravity of his day before he was used by God to facilitate restoration and reformation. His efforts healed the breach of thousands of years of error and sin which Solomon initiated. You too can be used by God to mend the gap of generational error which has persisted historically for many years in your context, family, church, community, etc. This is true for your life personally and for your environment corporately.

Again I remind you of one of the results of fasting from Isaiah 58, that great Old Testament fasting chapter:

**Isaiah 58:12** Those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; You will raise up the age-old foundations; And you will be called the repairer of the breach, The restorer of the streets in which to dwell.

May all grace and peace abound to you always.

To be continued

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