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## Ezra 9

(2019)

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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

## Ezra 9

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### Topics

- Priests are not separated from abominations of the Canaanites.
- Ezra is appalled by the faithlessness of the returned exiles.
- Israel's iniquities and guilt has mounted up to the heavens.
- We are slaves, yet God has not forsaken us in our slavery.
- The people of the land, have filled it with their abominations.
- God, has punished us less than our iniquities deserved.

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### INTRODUCTION

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The book of Ezra begins where 2 Chronicles ended as prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 44:28) the Persian King Cyrus had sent exiles led by Zerubbabel back to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. (Persia had defeated Babylon in 539 B.C.). Despite opposition from the non-Jewish inhabitants of Judea, and after encouragement by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah the temple was rebuilt (515 B.C.). Then in 458 B.C., Ezra led the second of three waves of returning exiles. By the time Ezra arrived, the people had again fallen into sin, Ezra preached God's word and the people repented (10:9-17). Ezra succeeded because God's hand was upon him (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28) (Ezra 8:18, 22, 31). This book (probably written by Ezra), shows that God uses pagan kings to accomplish His purposes and His faithfulness to His promises and His people.

**NOTE:** for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

**The previous chapter:** begins with the genealogy of the second wave of those who left Babylonia and journeyed to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra and gives a list the chief men that accompanied him. The chapter ends with them arriving at Jerusalem with the vast weight of silver and gold that the king of Persia had granted them and the exiles offering burnt offerings to the LORD.

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### EZRA 9:1-2

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**The story so far:** Cyrus king of Persia conquered Babylon and gave the Jews permission to return to Jerusalem. Ezra had returned with Zerubbabel in the first wave of returning exiles. Later he returned to Babylon with an embassy of faithful men where he won the favour of the Persian king and returned in the second wave with the Jews spoken of in this chapter.

### Priests are Not Separated from Abominations of the Canaanites.

- **Ezra 9:1-2:** After these things had been done, the officials (princes in KJV) 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. <sup>2</sup> 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."

**After these things had been done:** (v1) after Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem the first days were occupied with the returned exiles:

- Refreshing themselves, and weighing the money and vessels they brought and putting it into the hands of priest and Levites
- Offering sacrifices to the LORD, and delivering the king of Persia edict to the military lieutenants and civil governors of the province.

The royal authority that the king of Persia had empowered Ezra with was publicly made known to his own people by the delivery of the vast weight of silver and gold and the sacred vessels he brought back from Babylon and handed over to the priests to be placed in the House of the LORD. The remainder of the book focuses on Ezra's ministry as a moral reformer. After sometime Ezra discovered that from the time the first wave of exiles had returned to Judah and Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel until his arrival, they were living contrary to the laws of God, which demanded immediate correction. One of the main corruptions practiced throughout the land concerned the law of marriage, which Ezra regarded as fatal to the design of God in separating (for a season) His peculiar people from the surrounding heathen nations. To marry women from the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites was forbidden by the following law:

- **Deuteronomy 7:1-3:** "When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, <sup>2</sup> and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. <sup>3</sup> You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons,

Though the Moabites, Ammonites and Egyptians are not mentioned in these verses, they were forbidden to marry woman of any foreign nation for the same reason lest they should be drawn into idolatry. Some would have taken foreign wives when they were in Babylon, while many others not only took them for themselves after they had returned; but also, took them for their sons. The LORD had called out of Egypt the people of Israel to be a holy seed separated from all other nations and chosen them to be a holy people above all others, and devoted to His service and worship. What makes this offense even worse is the fact the primary offenders are the chief men, the officials, the priests and the Levites (v1-2) who should have restrained the people from this sin by their authority and example, but instead involved themselves and the nation in the guilt of it.

**Abominations:** generally the expression, "to do abominations," is an phrase in Scripture language that applies to anything that is against God's law, especially to the worship of idols; but here its primary focus is upon the men of Israel taking heathen woman for wives, which as Israel's history shows, eventually led the Jewish husbands to worship their wives gods and thereby commit idolatry. Mixed marriages prevented complete separation of the people of God from the idolatrous rites, which the Law required for the purity of the Jewish nation.

- **1 Kings 11:2:** from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love.

**The holy race (holy seed in KJV):** (v2) in (Exod. 19:6) they are referred to as the holy nation and in (Isaiah 6:13) the holy seed. They are called a holy seed, because of the covenant that God had made with them, by which they were created to be a peculiar people, separated from all other nations.

## **Ezra is Appalled by the Faithlessness of the Returned Exiles.**

- **Ezra 9:3-4:** As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak (mantle in KJV) and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled. <sup>4</sup> Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness (transgression in KJV) of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice.

I rent my garment and my cloak (mantle in KJV), though Ezra's outward actions of renting his inner garment and of plucking his hair clearly manifested his extreme horror and grief, both actions were symbolical acts, teaching the people who witnessed them that the life the chief men, the priest and Levites were living was extremely offensive to the LORD.

**All who trembled at the words of the God of Israel:** (v4), refer to the faithful who stood in awe of God, honoured His word, and remained faithful to it. These people would have been aware of the judgment of God that came upon the land of Judah and Jerusalem by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and because of the peoples gross sin the city of Jerusalem was burnt, the temple pillaged and the people taken captive for seventy-years, which means that their trembling would stem from the fear that God would again bring the same or some similar judgment upon the land of Israel.

- **Isaiah 66:2-5:** All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.
- **Isaiah 66:5:** Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word: "Your brothers who hate you and cast you out for my name's sake have said, 'Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy'; but it is they who shall be put to shame.

**The returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled:** (v4) generally speaking the returned exiles here, refers to those who had returned with Ezra in the second wave, and not to those who had returned with Zerubbabel in the first wave for these had been in the land for some length of time, and were the ones guilty of taking foreign women for wives, however, there would have been a remnant amongst them that had remained faithful and did stand with Ezra to support and strengthen him. All who revered God's word and dreaded its threatening's and judgments joined with Ezra in lamenting the public sin, and formulating ways of addressing it.

**The evening sacrifice:** (v4) this was the usual hour the people used to assemble together to publicly pray, thank God, confess sin and petition God.

- **Psalm 141:2:** Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!
- **Acts 3:1:** Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.

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## **EZRA'S PRAYER**

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### **EZRA 9:5-7**

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## **Israel's Iniquities and Guilt has Mounted up to the Heavens.**

- **Ezra 9:5-7:** 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, <sup>6</sup> saying: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. <sup>7</sup> From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt (great trespass in KJV). And for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and to utter shame, as it is today.

**Ezra fell upon his knees and spread out his hands to the LORD:** (v5) foreseeing the dangerous consequences that mixed marriages would have upon the nation would have overwhelmed Ezra with deep sorrow because of the enormous difficulty of correcting such widespread corruption, especially when it's the chief leaders, the priests and Levites who are the main culprits and because once a marriage had been formed and children born and affections developed, it is enormously difficult for people involved in such relationships to change their ways. It is easy to see why Ezra upon recognizing the enormity of this sin and carrying such a heavy burden and a deep sense of emergency fell to his knees before the LORD with an overwhelming sense of astonishment, especially when God had shown him and the returning exiles so much favour during their journey from Babylon to Jerusalem.

**O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you:** (v6), Ezra's prayer begins with him claiming God as his own, saying, "O my God;" but the people of Israel are regarded as one, and national sins as one, and he is praying as the representative of the people and therefore continues the prayer with the words, "our iniquities" (v6) and "O our God" (v10), without returning again to the first person.

**For our iniquities our kings, and priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands:** (v7) the covenant Israel entered into at Mount Sinai with God promised to make them the head of all nations if they obeyed His laws, and to bring them to ruin if they did not. History clearly shows that they did not, this is why Ezra in this prayer, says, "From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt" (great trespass in KJV) (v7). This is the reason the ten tribes and their king were delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria, and the kings of Judah, Jehoiakim, Jeconiah, and Zedekiah, into the hands of the king of Babylon, with the priests, some were slain with the sword, others carried captive, and their houses and the House of the LORD plundered, which should have filled the nation with great shame when they reflected on their sins and turned them from their evil ways.

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## EZRA'S PRAYER CONTINUED

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### EZRA 9:8

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#### **We are Slaves, Yet God has Not Forsaken Us in Our Slavery.**

- **Ezra 9:8-9:** But now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant (to escape in KJV) and to give us a secure hold (a nail in KJV) within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery (bondage in KJV).

**Now for a brief moment (a little space in KJV):** (v8) favor (grace in the KJV) has been shown by the LORD. The "little space" refers to the time of Cyrus which to the present time of Ezra was nearly two generations, which in Ezra's mind was but a brief moment in comparison to the past and the future. The idea is that God had delivered and restored Israel, and they had enjoyed His blessing and favour for this little while, and yet they are so quickly returned to their former sin and corruptions, by which once again they are in danger of bringing an end to God's favour and their own happiness and peace.

**Favor has been shown by the LORD, to leave us a remnant:** (v8) referring to those who had returned with him, and any who may have remained faithful amongst the first wave of returning exiles under the leadership of Zerubbabel.

**To give us a secure hold (a nail in KJV) within his holy place:** (v8) the metaphor is probably drawn from a tent-pin, which is driven into the earth to make the tent firm and secure, figuratively it is an expression that carries the idea of security. The meaning is a fixed holy settlement and refers to the following three things:

1. Firstly, refers to the land of Judea, which is called the holy land.
2. Secondly, the city of Jerusalem that the LORD had chosen which is called the holy city.
3. Thirdly, and most importantly, the temple which is called the holy temple, for it was upon the temple that all their hopes hung.

**That our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving:** (v8) in the same way that darkness often signifies a state of sorrow and affliction, likewise, light signifies joy and comfort, which means the expression, "may God brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving," carries the idea that He would refresh their spirits and comfort their hearts and replace their great sorrow and sense of shame with gladness of heart.

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## EZRA'S PRAYER CONTINUED

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### EZRA 9:9

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- **Ezra 9:9:** For we are slaves (bondmen in KJV). Yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery (bondage in KJV), but has extended to us his steadfast love (mercy in KJV) before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection (a wall in KJV) in Judea and Jerusalem.

The English standard Bible says, "For we are slaves" (bondmen in KJV), while the King James Bible says, "For we were bondmen," because of this there are two different interpretations of what Ezra had in mind, following is the first, based upon the English standard Bibles translation:

1. Though they had returned to their own land and the king of Persia had given them great liberty, they were still in in subjection to his rule and authority and in this sense, they are slaves" (bondmen in KJV) to the Persian monarchy.
2. The second, based upon the King James Bible, is far more fitting. The statement, "For we were bondmen" refers to their seventy years captivity in Babylon under the rule and authority of the Babylonian kings, which is far more likely since they were separated from their own land, their beloved city and the House of the LORD.

Yet, God had not completely abandon them to their bondage, but manifested His steadfast love (mercy in KJV) in the sight of the kings of Persia who released them to a little time of reviving (or refreshing) to set up the House of the LORD and repair its ruins, under the kings protection in Judea and Jerusalem and in this sense gave them a small revival or the beginnings of a revival. While in captivity separated from their beloved land, city and temple it was as if they were in their graves, and upon the proclamation of Cyrus, to return to their own land, to set up the House of God, and repair the ruins of the city and the temple and restore their worship it was as if they rose from the dead, like the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision. (Ezek. 37:1-14). This present revival should have been the beginning of a nation-wide revival, but Ezra becoming aware of the corruption in the land was fully aware of the great difficulties to be overcome for such a revival to take place throughout the land, which is the reason for this long heartfelt prayer before the LORD.

**To give us a wall:** (v9) verse nine in the King James Bible says, "God hath not forsaken us, but hath extended mercy to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem." This does not refer to the literal wall around the city of Jerusalem, for that was not yet built. In this context the wall can refer to the following three things:

1. To the gracious providence of God, which had planted them in their own land, and watched over them from time to time.
2. To the walls of their houses, which they had rebuilt in Judah and Jerusalem

3. The word wall signifies a hedge or fence, like those set around gardens and vineyards etc., to protect the fruit from pests and vermin, which means that the wall may denote the kings of Persia, whose edicts were their security and defence against all those enemies that were encompassed around them.
  - **Job 1:10:** Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

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## EZRA'S PRAYER CONTINUED

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### EZRA 9:10-12

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#### **The People of the Land, have Filled it with their Abominations.**

- **Ezra 9:10-12:** “And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, <sup>11</sup> which you commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, ‘The land that you are entering, to take possession of it, is a land impure with the impurity of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations that have filled it from end to end with their uncleanness. <sup>12</sup> Therefore do not give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters for your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.’”

And now, what shall we say after this? What apology can we make for our ingratitude, after you O’LORD bestowed such great and high favours upon us, and we have so grossly abused and forsaken them, especially your commandments concerning marriages to other nations.

The command not give their daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for their sons are clearly recorded in the book of Deuteronomy.

- **Deuteronomy 7:3:** You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons,
- **Deuteronomy 23:6:** You shall not seek their peace or their prosperity all your days forever.

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## EZRA'S PRAYER CONTINUED

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### EZRA 9:13-15

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#### **God, has Punished us Less than Our Iniquities Deserved.**

- **Ezra 9:13-15:** And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, seeing that you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserved and have given us such a remnant as this, <sup>14</sup> shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations? Would you not be angry with us until you consumed us, so that there should be no remnant, nor any to escape? <sup>15</sup> O LORD, the God of Israel, you are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is today. Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this.”

Ezra is in such a state of overwhelming disappointment shame and disgust at the corrupt behavior of the chief men, the priest and the Levites that:

1. He firstly, feels that the LORD was fully justified for punishing them for their abominations, idolatries, corruptions and the many sins that they were grossly guilty of.
2. He secondly feels, that the LORD was extremely righteous and merciful to show them such favour through the edicts of Cyrus and Darius which secured their protection and decreed many favours upon the Jewish people.

3. He thirdly feels, that because the people of Israel have returned to their old sinful ways and evil deeds after all these things, the LORD would be fully justified to consuming them so that there would be no escaping and no remnant left.

Ezra's prayer is a heartbreaking and remorseful confession of the sin of the LORD's people, and he speaks of sin as one much ashamed, for godly shame is as necessary in true repentance as is godly sorrow. But let this be the comfort of those who truly repent, that though their sins reach to the heavens, God's mercy is in the heavens. Everyone in the body of Christ, no matter how faithful must at time wonder how they have not wearied out the Lord's patience, and brought judgment upon themselves, but, the true penitent has nothing to fear for the heavenly Advocate pleads most powerfully on their behalf, which is not the case of the ungodly.

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*

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