

**Ezra 9:1 ¶** Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, *doing* according to their abominations, *even* of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

**Ezra 9:2** For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of *those* lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.

It seems that some of the Jewish leaders came to Ezra to confess that there were many among the returning remnant that had not maintained separation from the heathen nations in the matter of marriage and were taking part in some of their morally disgusting (from the Hebrew for “abominations”) practices. Even some of the priests and Levites were guilty of this. The leaders then admitted that some of the recognized leaders among them were the lead offenders.

I would imagine this action was a response to Ezra’s teaching of God’s law since he had been there over four months by this time.

**Ezra 9:3** And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.

**Ezra 9:4** Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

**Ezra 9:5 ¶** And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God,

When Ezra heard their report, he responded by tearing his garments and pulling out his hair and beard, acts of one in distress or mourning. He sat down stunned with devastation (from Hebrew for “astonied”). Those men that recognized the seriousness of their transgression in reference to God’s law gathered around Ezra. At the time of the evening sacrifice Ezra finally got up only to fall back on his knees and spread out his hands in prayer before the LORD “my God.”

Such a simple truth, but oh so important—to know God as your God, the one to whom you have surrendered as the authority in your life. That is what provides one with the privilege to approach God in prayer.

I liked the application made by Ironside: “It is far easier to stand aside and point out the low state of the rest—even to withdraw altogether from their company—than to emulate Ezra who, by his personal faithfulness, lifted the whole company to a higher plane. There will be less trouble, less perplexity, less concern, if one simply turns away and leaves the rest to go on as they will; but God is not, thereby glorified nor are failing saints recovered.”

**Ezra 9:6** And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over *our* head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.

**Ezra 9:7** Since the days of our fathers *have we been* in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, *and* our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as *it is* this day.

**Ezra 9:8** And now for a little space grace hath been *shewed* from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage.

**Ezra 9:9** For we *were* bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.

Ezra's prayer (my paraphrase): My God, I am ashamed to have to come before You and admit that we have sinned greatly. We have such a long history of continued sin and realize that is why You delivered us into the hands of heathen kings and into captivity. In Your gracious mercy, You allowed this remnant to return to the land You gave us to once again establish our roots with hope for the future and relief from bondage. Through it all You have never forsaken us. It is through Your mercy that the kings of Persia have supported us in returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. Because of You we get a second chance at having our own homeland.

**Ezra 9:10** And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments,

**Ezra 9:11** Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness.

**Ezra 9:12** Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave *it* for an inheritance to your children for ever.

**Ezra 9:13** And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities *deserve*, and hast given us *such* deliverance as this;

**Ezra 9:14** Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed *us*, so that *there should be* no remnant nor escaping?

**Ezra 9:15** O LORD God of Israel, thou *art* righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as *it is* this day: behold, we *are* before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee because of this.

Ezra continued: Now, O our God, we humbly admit that we have yet again disobeyed Your commandments. Though Your word forbade it, we have taken wives for ourselves and our sons from among the heathen people in the land. We have taken part in some of their morally disgusting practices. We know that we deserve far greater punishment than that You have inflicted upon us and surely don't deserve Your deliverance. We know that we should not again go against Your law and chance making You so angry that You destroy us

completely. We know You are righteous! We know it is only by Your mercy that You haven't already destroyed us. We are ashamed of our sin as we stand before You now.

It is notable that Ezra identifies with the people as he confesses the sin of the people before God. I understand that he is speaking from a mournful heart. Still, it seems he has lost sight of the fact that God would never break His covenants with Abraham or David. He would never completely destroy the people of Israel; He will always preserve a remnant through whom He will fulfill those covenants.

*Genesis 17:3–8 “And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”*

*2 Samuel 7:8–13 “Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the LORD of hosts....when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.”*