

Coming out of Babylonian captivity, the Israelites start the rebuilding of God's temple as it was a very significant part of their lives. It was the place they offered worship, sacrifice, and encountered God. **Ezra 9** finds a significant prayer of confession.

**Ezra 9:1-2** *When these things had been done, the Jewish leaders came to me and said, "Many of the people of Israel, and even some of the priests and Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the other peoples living in the land. They have taken up the detestable practices of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites. For the men of Israel have married women from these people and have taken them as wives for their sons. So the holy race has become polluted by these mixed marriages. Worse yet, the leaders and officials have led the way in this outrage."*

Israel was living under a different covenant than we have today. Israel was bound to the law that gave direction for the covering of their sin and how to engage their God. Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice and established a new covenant for us today. This grace of Jesus made salvation available to anyone who calls on the name of the Lord.

**Ezra 9** and **I Corinthians 7:12-13** both speak of this intermarriage that leads to a watering down of God's Word. **Ezra 9** speaks of this as a morality problem. They had a tendency to idol worship and to drift to other things as they intermarry. These other peoples had many other gods they worshiped and so it caused Israel to drift. As we allow sin to infiltrate our lives, it will take us farther than we want to go and cause more harm than we think it can. Israel's morality and purity before God was at stake. Ezra offers this great prayer of confession.

**Ezra 9:3** Ezra was astonished at hearing the condition of the people. All Ezra could do was to stop and fall down in anguish before God. Go back... How did they get in this place?

- First, God spoke to the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah about the Israel's unfaithfulness and idolatry.
- God takes His people into exile as Babylon conquers them.
- At the end of the exile of 70 years, Daniel reads God's Word and prays.
- The Persians come and set the Israelite people free.
- Zerubabel and Jeshua led the first group of Israelites back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. It takes 20 years.
- Another 58-60 years happen between Ezra 6 and 7. Prophets Haggai and Zechariah speak to the rebuilding.
- Prophet Ezra returns with the second release of Israelites from captivity and comes to restore worship and the preaching of God's Word. Ezra wants to instill to His people what hasn't happened in these 80 or so years. For 80 years the temple sat without true worship. Nehemiah comes also to rebuild community in Israel.

At the point in **Ezra 9**, Ezra became so appalled to hear of the idolatry that he falls down, tears his clothes, pulls out his hair and beard. He is grieving over the result of sin in God's people. Ezra's heart for God's people was to restore true worship. Hours later he fell on his knees and stretched out his hands to the Lord. He recognized the weight of sin. And he prays... **Ezra 9:6-15**

Today, let's not miss the significance of this confession before the Lord. The people were over and over redeemed and yet continued to go back to the old ways, to let culture creep in, adding to the true worship.

**1. Rooted in scripture. Ezra 9:10** *And now, O our God, what can we say after all of this? For once again we have abandoned your commands! Deuteronomy 7:4-6* *For they will lead your children away from me to worship other gods. Then the anger of the Lord will burn against you, and He will quickly destroy you. This is what you must do. You must break down their pagan altars and shatter their sacred pillars. Cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols. For you are a holy people, who belong to the Lord your God. Of all the people on earth, the Lord your God has chosen you to be His own special treasure.*

A true confession will be rooted in God's Word. Knowing right and wrong is from God's Word. We can't rely on our feelings or our emotions but on His Word. Scripture reveals sin. God offers grace by giving His commands. Israel's disobedience to God's commands always resulted in bondage. Sin will always result in bondage in our lives. The emphasis is not shame and condemnation but that we would be redeemed and set free.

Israel did not deny God but they added to their worship of God. Today, around 70% of people claim to be Christian in our country. But we don't see 70% looking like Christians. What isn't lining up? People don't necessarily abandon God but allow culture and society to define our lives and then are indistinguishable as Christians. If we take God seriously then we must also take sin seriously!

Ezra was not guilty of what he confessed but confessed as if the sin was his and his peoples - broken for his people. **I John 2:15** *Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

Ezra desired to restore true worship and it began with an honest confession of sin. Scripture always reveals the results... 4 times in the prayer he mentions exile and escape both due to God's grace.

**2. Marked by mourning.** Tearing clothes and pulling out hair! R. C. Sproul says, "It is partly because sin does not provoke our own wrath that we do not believe that sin provokes the wrath of God." How easy to believe God feels the same of our sin as we do. Ezra mourned and collapsed. We tend to be unmoved by our sin. It has become too common that we ignore. We must become a broken people of our sin. Ezra understood the outcome of continuing to sin without repentance - bondage.

**3. Is honest and without excuse.** Our response is important. Ezra never offers an excuse and is honest before God. **Ezra 9:15** *O Lord, God of Israel, You are just. We come before You in our guilt as nothing but an escaped remnant, though in such a condition none of us can stand in Your presence.*

We serve a God who went to the cross for our sins - a God who redeems us! Ezra was restoring worship in the temple building - today we are the temple. We can have a form of the temple without the function and without true worship to God. We must humble ourselves and confess as Ezra did. J. C. Ryle says, "Christ is never truly valued until sin is clearly seen." There can be no repentance without confession and no forgiveness without confession. Worship begins with humbly confessing our sin. Our sin... my sin... was the reason for the cross - mourn over that. Jesus Christ willing gave His life on the cross because He loves you. He redeems us. We must believe we need redemption - redemption from sin - calling sin what it is - sin.

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What favorite sin do you explain away as a weakness, fault, shortcoming? the secret things in our head? Where have you softened God's Word to make it more palatable for you or another?

What sin, misstep, shortcoming, fault, or tendency are you holding on to?

Read Ezra's prayer as your own.