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## Ezra: Chapters 9 & 10

### **Background**

In our previous study, we looked at chapter 8 of Ezra. This chapter chronicles the return of the second party of Jews who accompanied Ezra to Jerusalem to fulfil a commission given to them by the Lord. Previously we had read of the return of the first party with Zerubbabel earlier in Ezra. The book of Nehemiah covers the return of the third main party in Nehemiah.

We could see how Ezra and his party moved in faith, travelling several hundred miles from Babylon to Jerusalem carrying an awesome treasure without an armed guard. They acted in a confidence derived from knowing that they were acting in God's will, and consequently He would provide for their safekeeping. Imagine what king Artaxerxes must have thought when he saw this party about to travel to Jerusalem unguarded despite carrying such priceless treasure.

Throughout Scripture we can see that it was important for the Jewish nation to be 'set apart' or 'separated from'<sup>1</sup>. Indeed when we look at 'Holiness' in our study of the same name, we read in Leviticus 10:10 "*You are to make a distinction between the holy and the profane*". When we look at Ezra 9, we can see the depth of sin that the Jewish people had fallen into, in direct disobedience to God's commands and instructions. Imagine how Ezra must have felt in returning to Jerusalem as part of a commission from God, only to come face to face with such terrible sin.

In our studies on 'Prayer' together, we look at Daniel's prayer (Daniel 9:4-19). In Ezra 9:6-15 we can see many common features, not because Daniel and Ezra prayed in a set pattern or way; more rather because their profound grief at the sin of their people made it so that the way they prayed was as prayer truly should be - heartfelt, honest and at times intercessory.

### **The Message**

In Ezra's prayer we read of his attitude (Ezra 9:5), his sense of shame (Ezra 9:6), his confession (Ezra 9:7), his gratitude (Ezra 9:8, 9), his deep conviction of sin (Ezra 9:10-14), and his dependency only on divine mercy (Ezra 9:15). Observe how God answered the prayer by graciously working on the people's hearts, the leaders first, and then the people generally. Shecaniah (Ezra 10:2), was a brave man in the attitude he took, for while his name does not appear in the subsequent list of offenders, yet those of his near relatives do (Ezra 10:26). Note

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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew word for 'separated from' is '*badal*', which is derived from the primitive root meaning to divide (literally or figuratively, separate, distinguish, differ, select, etc.): --(make, put) difference, divide (asunder), (make) separate (self, -ation), sever (out).



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the phrase (Ezra 10:2): “*Yet there is now hope for Israel concerning this thing*”.

In the listing of those guilty of intermarriage (Ezra 10:18-43), we see that only one singer and three gatekeepers were involved. No temple servants or descendants of Solomon’s servants sinned through intermarriage.

### **Questions**

1. How did the Jewish people disobey God (Ezra 9:1, 2; see also Deuteronomy 7:1-5 and Malachi 2:10-16)?
2. What was the response of Ezra (Ezra 9:3-15)?
3. What is interesting about what Ezra prays in Ezra 9:6?
4. Can we apply any aspects of Ezra’s prayer in our own prayer life? How do we pray when we see the state of our nation (of our world)?
5. What radical steps were subsequently taken by Ezra and the leaders (Ezra 10:6-8)<sup>2</sup>?
6. What was the response of the people (Ezra 10:9)?

Spend a few minutes reflecting quietly on what you have learnt in Ezra, how it may have challenged you, and how you feel you might apply what you have learnt to your life.

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<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew word for ‘forfeit’ in verse 8 is ‘*charam*’ which is a primitive root meaning to seclude; specifically (by a ban) to devote to religious uses (especially destruction); physical and reflexive, to be blunt as to the nose: -make accursed, consecrate, (utterly) destroy, devote, forfeit, have a flat nose, utterly (slay, make away).