

EZRA 9

A SOLEMN AND SORROWFUL CONFESSION

When Ezra came to Jerusalem and saw the grace of God at work among his countrymen there, no doubt he was glad; and like Barnabas in Acts 11:23, he probably exhorted them all to hold fast to the Lord. Ezra saw nothing amiss among the people at first, but now a damp was brought upon his joys. Information was brought to him that many of the people – and even some of the priests, Levites, and rulers themselves – had married heathen wives and joined themselves in close affinity with the ungodly. Herein they disobeyed the express command of God, which forbade all close friendships – and especially marriage – with the heathen (Deut. 7:3). They profaned the crown of their separation from the world, and they exposed themselves and their children to the temptations of idolatry – the very same sin, introduced by this very same way, which had been the ruin of their nation and the cause of their captivity in Babylon!

Information concerning this sorry state of affairs was given to Ezra by the public leaders who had kept their integrity. This news made a deep impression upon the righteous man; he tore his clothes, pulled out his hair, and sat down astonished! In this way, he expressed his deep sense of the dishonor that had been done hereby to God and His laws – especially after He had shown His people so many good favors. His grief also had an influence upon others. He probably went to the house of the Lord, and public notice was soon taken of his actions; and all who were devout and serious assembled themselves to him, of their own accord.

We may guess what the meditations of Ezra's heart were, while he sat down astonished for some hours, by the words of his mouth when he finally spoke, around the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. At that time, devout people would come into the courts of the Temple to witness the sacrifice, and to offer up their own prayers to Jehovah in concurrence with it. In the hearing of all who were present there, Ezra prayed aloud to the Lord, and made a public confession of the sins of the people. And as the sacrifice was a picture of the blessed Lamb of God Who was to take away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, Ezra surely had an eye of faith – looking forward to this Great Sacrifice – as he made his penitential address to the Lord at this hour. He fell upon his knees, in the posture of a humble penitent pleading for mercy – thereby representing the people for whom he was now interceding; and herein, he was a picture of Jesus, our Great Intercessor!

Very devout and pious were the affections which Ezra expressed in his address to God. His words are a penitent confession of the sin of his people,

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Ezra hears about marriages between Israelites and the heathen – verses 1-2
- ❖ He and others are greatly distressed by this information – verses 3-4
- ❖ He makes a solemn and sorrowful confession of this sin to the Lord – verses 5-15

from a gracious concern for the honor of God and the well-being of Israel. He acknowledged that the sins of his people were very great: "Our iniquities are increased over our heads," he said (verse 6). But let this be the comfort of all those who are truly repentant: although their sins reach up to the heavens, God's mercy is *in the heavens!* (Ps. 36:5) Where sin abounds, grace will much more abound! Ezra confessed that their sins had been persisted in for a long time; yet grace and mercy had been shown to them from the Lord, through the kings of Persia. They had been permitted to return home from Babylon, and they had been enabled to build the Temple of the Lord. But now they had ungratefully offended the Lord Who had been so kind to them! Their sin was against the express command of God: "Give not your daughters to their sons," He had commanded; "nor take their daughters to your sons." In the judgments by which they had already smarted for their sins, the Lord had punished them less than their iniquities deserved; yet they had abused His favor and turned His grace into a reason for even greater sins.

In Ezra's prayer, we may see the devout affections that were working in his heart as he made this confession. Speaking of sin, in verse 6, he spoke as one who was much ashamed. Sin is indeed a shameful thing; as soon as our first parents had eaten the forbidden fruit in Eden's Paradise, they were ashamed of themselves. But holy shame is a necessary ingredient in true repentance; it is just as necessary as holy sorrow is. When the tax collector in Jesus' parable went to the Temple to pray, he hung down his head more than ever, as one who was ashamed (Luke 18:13). We should also notice how Ezra addressed Jehovah, in verse 6, as *his God!* The remembrance of our covenant-relationship with the Lord will help to humble us; it will break our hearts for sin, and it will encourage us to hope for pardon upon repentance. In verses 13 and 14, Ezra spoke as one who was greatly afraid. After all the judgments that had come upon them to reclaim them from their sins, and after all the deliverances that the Lord had worked for them; could they expect anything other than His anger, when they willingly broke His commandments again? There is not a surer or sadder sign of ruin coming to any people, than revolting to the same sins again after great judgments and great deliverances.

This holy man also spoke as one who was much assured of the Lord's righteousness, and he was resolved to leave the matter with Him Whose judgment is according to truth. He is righteous, wise, just, and good; so Ezra cast himself and his people upon His mercy. Thus this Godly man laid his grief before the Lord, and then left it in His hands.

Lord Jesus, we praise You as our Great High Priest and Intercessor, for You are the only One Who can close the deadly breach that we have made by our sins! Amen.

