

Restoration of Exiles: The Book of Ezra Chapter 9

This chapter consists of a description of a problem (vv. 1-2), Ezra's immediate response (vv. 3-5), and his prayer about the situation (vv. 6-15).

Read Ezra 9:1-2

1. What sin had the people in Ezra's day committed?
2. What was God's commandment concerning the inhabitants of the land of Canaan when he first gave it to Israel (Deuteronomy 7:1-6)?
3. The word "for" often introduces an explanation about something that had just been stated. What explanation of God's law does the "for" in Deuteronomy 7:4 give us?
4. What additional explanation does the "for" in Deuteronomy 7:6 give?
5. In addition to "the people" (Ezra 9:1), what other groups had violated the commandment not to marry the people of the land (v. 1, v. 2)?
6. Does the New Testament forbid Christians from marrying non-Christians? Does it instruct Christians who have unbelieving spouses to divorce them? (consider 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 1 Corinthians 7:12-16; 1 Peter 3:1-2).
7. Write a sentence about what you think God's perspective on marrying an unbeliever is.

Notice that the people's intermarrying people from the land called unfaithfulness five times in Ezra 9-10 (9:2, 4; 10:2, 6, 10). In these passages the word is a general term for infidelity against the Lord. By disobeying his direct command, they were unfaithful to him.

Read Ezra 9:3-5. This describes Ezra's sorrow and mourning over sin. (Cf. Joel 2:12; James 4:9). Notice the words that describe what Ezra was doing: pulling hair from his head and beard, being appalled, and self-abasement. Some godly people gathered around Ezra as he did this.

8. How are these godly people described (v. 4)? Read Isaiah 66:1-6 and notice the same description is used there twice (v. 2, 5). What does the phrase mean? Is this something you do? Will other believers always appreciate the believers who do this (see Isaiah 66:5).

Ezra 9:6-15 record Ezra's actual prayer.

9. Read the entire now and jot down whatever stands out most to you.

10. Scan through vv. 3-15 again, focusing on how Ezra felt about sin. Jot down some key phrases as you read, and then write a statement that sums up how he felt about sin. How does this compare to your own feelings toward sin?

Notice "our" sins and "our" guilt (vv. 6-7) and "we" have forsaken the commands (v. 10). Although not everyone had intermarried, Ezra speaks as if those who had done so made the entire group guilty before God (cf. Joshua 7:1-11 where Achan commits an act of sin but the text says "Israel" has sinned (v. 11)).

11. Do you believe God withholds his blessings on an entire church due to the sins of a few people in it?

12. According to Ezra 9:7, are there consequences of sin during our lifetimes? Do you think this means that anytime anything bad happens in our lives, we have sinned?

Ezra 9:8-9 describe the events we have been reading about in the book of Ezra in terms of God's graciousness.

Ezra 9:10-12 are something of a "sermon" on Deuteronomy 7:1-6. It is not an exact quote but gives the gist

Ezra 9:13-15 returns to Ezra's horror over their sin.

13. What do you think of the statement in Ezra 9:13b? Is this the usual way people feel when they get consequences for doing wrong?

Ezra 9:14b suggests what they have done is serious enough that God may well totally destroy them. This is serious business.

14. Did Ezra ask for mercy or forgiveness? If you think yes, what verse does he ask for it in? If you think no, Why do you think he did not?

15. Explain and comment on this quote related to #14: "It is no doubt a weakness of modern spirituality that it regards a real fear of God's wrath which does not immediately lead to assurance of God's forgiveness as something fanatical."