
EZRA 9: 1 Now when these things were done, the princes drew near to me, saying, "The people of Israel, and the priests and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, following their abominations, even those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

The princes inform Ezra that many of the people now settled in the had married heathen wives; and several of the rulers were principal offenders in this thing, Ezr 9:1, Ezr 9:2. He is greatly afflicted, Ezr 9:3, Ezr 9:4. His prayer to God on thus account, Ezr 9:5-15.

Verse 1

The people of Israel - These were they who had returned at first with Zerubbabel, and were settled in the land of Judea and whom Ezra found on his arrival to be little better than the Canaanitish nations from whom God had commanded them ever to keep separate.

EZRA 9: 2 For they have taken of their daughters for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy seed have mixed themselves with the peoples of the lands. Yes, the hand of the princes and rulers has been chief in this trespass."

Verse 2

Hath been chief in this trespass - They who are the first men have been the most capital offenders; so Virgil, Aen. ix. 783: -

Unus homo, vestris, o cives, undique septus

Aggeribus, tantas strages impune per urbem Ediderit?

Juvenum primos tot miserit orco? "Shall one, and he enclosed within your walls,

One rash imprisoned warrior, vanquish all?

Calm you look on, and see the furious foe

Plunge crowds of heroes to the shades below!"

Pitt.

The first of the Trojan youth were the chief, the most illustrious; so we say the first men of the kingdom for the nobles, etc.

EZRA 9: 3 When I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down confounded.

Verse 3

I rent my garment and my mantle - The outer and inner garment, in sign of great grief. This significant act is frequently mentioned in the sacred writings, and was common among all ancient nations.

Plucked off the hair - Shaving the head and beard were signs of excessive grief; much more so the plucking off the hair, which must produce exquisite pain. All this testified his abhorrence, not merely of the act of having taken strange wives, but their having also joined them in their idolatrous abominations.

EZRA 9: 4 Then were assembled to me everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of their trespass of the captivity; and I sat confounded until the evening offering.

Verse 4

Those that had been carried away - Those that had returned long before with Zerubbabel; see Ezr 9:1.

Until the evening sacrifice - The morning sacrifice was the first of all the offerings of the day, the evening sacrifice the last. As the latter was offered between the two evenings, i.e., between sunset and the end of twilight, so the former was offered between break of day and sunrise. Ezra sat astonished - confounded in his mind, distressed in his soul, and scarcely knowing what to do. He probably had withdrawn himself into some sequestered place, or into some secret part of the temple, spending the time in meditation and reflection.

EZRA 9: 5 At the evening offering I arose up from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn; and I fell on my knees, and spread out my hands to the LORD my God;

Verse 5

Fell upon my knees - In token of the deepest humility. Spread out my hands, as if to lay hold on the mercy of God. We have already had occasion to explain these significant acts.

EZRA 9: 6 and I said, "My God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to you, my God; for our iniquities have increased over our head, and our guiltiness has grown up to the heavens.

Verse 6

I am ashamed and blush - God had been so often provoked, and had so often pardoned them, and they had continued to transgress, that he was ashamed to go back again to the throne of grace to ask for mercy in their behalf. This is the genuine feeling of every reawakened backslider.

EZRA 9: 7 Since the days of our fathers we have been exceeding guilty to this day; and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests, have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to confusion of face, as it is this day.

EZRA 9: 8 Now for a little moment grace has been shown 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.

Verse 8

And now for a little space - This interval in which they were returning from servitude to their own land.

Grace hath been showed - God has disposed the hearts of the Persian kings to publish edicts in our favor.

To leave us a remnant to escape - The ten tribes are gone irrecoverably into captivity; a great part even of Judah and Benjamin had continued beyond the Euphrates: so that Ezra might well say, there was but a remnant which had escaped.

A nail in his holy place - Even so much ground as to fix our tent-poles in.

May lighten our eyes - To give us a thorough knowledge of ourselves and of our highest interest, and to enable us to re-establish his worship, is the reason why God has brought us back to this place.

A little reviving - We were perishing, and our hopes were almost dead; and, because of our sins, we were sentenced to death: but God in his great mercy has given us a new trial; and he begins with little, to see if we will make a wise and faithful use of it.

EZRA 9: 9 For we are bondservants; yet our God has not forsaken us in our bondage, but has extended loving kindness to 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 its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.

EZRA 9: 10 "Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments,

Verse 10

What shall we say after this? - Even in the midst of these beginnings of respite and mercy we have begun to provoke thee anew!

EZRA 9: 11 which you have commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land, to which you go to possess it, is an unclean land through the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, through their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their filthiness.

Verse 11

Have filled it from one end to another - The abominations have been like a sweeping mighty torrent, that has increased till it filled the whole land, and carried every thing before it.

EZRA 9: 12 Now therefore don't give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters to your sons, nor seek their peace or their prosperity forever; that you may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.'

EZRA 9: 13 "After all that has come on us for our evil deeds, and for our great guilt, since you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such a remnant,

Verse 13

Hast punished us less than our iniquities - Great, numerous, and oppressive as our calamities have been, yet merely as temporal punishments, they have been much less than our provocations have deserved.

EZRA 9: 14 shall we again break your commandments, and join in affinity with the peoples that do these abominations? Wouldn't you be angry with us until you had consumed us, so that there should be no remnant, nor any to escape?

EZRA 9: 15 LORD, the God of Israel, you are righteous; for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is this day. Behold, we are before you in our guiltiness; for no one can stand before you because of this."

Verse 15

Thou art righteous - Thou art merciful; this is one of the many meanings of the word צדק tsedek; and to this meaning St. Paul refers, when he says, God declares his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, Rom 3:25 (note). See the note there.

We remain yet escaped - Because of this righteousness or mercy.

In our trespasses - We have no righteousness; we are clothed and covered with our trespasses.

We cannot stand before thee because of this - The parallel place, as noted in the margin, is Psa 130:3 : If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? Every man must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ: but who shall stand there with joy? No man against whom the Lord marks iniquities. There is a reference here to the temple service: the priests and Levites stood and ministered before the Lord, but they were not permitted to do so unless pure from all legal pollution; so no man shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ who is not washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. Reader, how dost thou expect to stand there?