

## +++ And I Sat Astonied

### Ezra 9:1 – 15

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~ Our Spiritual Safari contemplates a profound prayer from Ezra in this report. The three post-captivity books of the Bible each have an awe-inspiring prayer in chapter nine; that is, Ezra chapter nine, Nehemiah chapter nine and Daniel chapter nine. All three belong to one particular group. Ezra's prayer is the result of sorrow that had broken out among the returning remnant of the children of Israel after the Babylonian captivity. This chapter also marks the beginning of reformation under Ezra; and reformation is always a biproduct of revival. First, we saw Israel return to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem; then we saw revival – but – a problem remains that we're going to learn all about in this leg of our expedition through the entire Word of God....

***<sup>1</sup> Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.***

~ Only when Edison comes along later in world history will the electric lights join this long list of other "ites!" Well, with or without lame attempts at humor, this is a great company of pagan and totally heathen people surrounding Israel. The Hittites were scattered throughout Asia Minor, for example; especially along the coasts in cities like Ephesus, Smyrna and Troy – all of those, and myriad others, were established by the Hittites. Godless societies dogged the returning remnant of the children of Israel on every side.

As we have learned in previous reports, the remnant of Israel experienced deep discouragement when they returned to Jerusalem and realized the magnitude of the state of destruction it was in. They weren't prepared for that. Evil and idolatry began running rampant at that time. Make no

mistake: they were a miserable and bedraggled bunch of people. In the prophecy of Haggai, we'll see how he led them to overcome all the different hurdles of disappointment and discontentment that were ever before them; and there are a whole long line of hurdles, too, by the way. The temple and the city walls were rebuilt because of the encouragement of these prophets. Without them being available for support, none of the work would have been completed, you may be sure.

Many Christians are let down and discouraged today. Tragically, it seems most other Christians are never there for them during those times. Truly, because of sin, the love of many hath waxed cold. Well, discouragement is the devil's best and most effective weapon. It leads to a drifting in faith in which the walls of separation with the lost world begin to be broken down; and that's when believers *ALWAYS* get together with unbelievers. For Israel, at the time in which we are studying, it manifest primarily through intermarriage with outside nations. I'm sure many didn't even bother getting married because the pagan doesn't care about marriage; nothing has changed in our modern day of intelligence and sophistication, either. I know many today pervert marriage for legal reasons; but – it's ultimately meaningless to them. I'm sure they thought they were highly advanced and civilized by disobeying God – just as the fool does today....

***<sup>2</sup> For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.***

~ So, the leaders of the people are even *MORE* responsible than the others; because having spiritual light always creates a greater responsibility to our subjects. It's a very bad condition these people are in at this time. I'm sure Ezra could have created a program about patriotism and run up the Israeli flag of David while holding huge rallies on national allegiance through marriage; but – that's not what he did. Ezra could have delivered a withering blow through speeches speaking out against the sin that was being committed. Maybe Ezra should have formed an organization to recover couples who had gone into disobedience, and developed a theory

that would straighten them out. The modern man would have chosen one of those three methods; but not Ezra....

***<sup>3</sup> And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.***

~ Ezra was overwhelmed with the low spiritual level his people had sunk to. Many of us – including myself – talk about apostasy in the church; but I don't think we're as learned about other problems as we should be. Frankly, I look at the church and I would like to say "... *this is no affair of mine.*" Unfortunately, it *IS* an affair of mine. The problem is: it's too easy to point our fingers at someone else and point out *THEIR* problems while ignoring our own unrepentance. Well, either way, Ezra didn't begin a tirade against his fellow countrymen for their shortcomings. That would be the way most people would handle it today; but not Ezra....

***<sup>4</sup> Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.***

~ We've seen Ezra tremble at the words of the Lord God of Israel in previous reports; and I happen to love that phrase. I'm sure there are very few who actually tremble at the Word of God today. How many of you readers honestly take the Bible seriously? I am pretty sure I know the fundamental church fairly well. There are some wonderful fundamentals, and they are, by far, the choicest people around; that's my crowd and I love them very much. However, there are some today who profess to have a love for the Word of God – and they have more notebooks full of sermon notes and Bibles with sections that cannot even be read anymore because of the underlining's and highlight markings – but their personal hearts and lives are scribbled on and marked-out, too. What's worse is that they are doing nothing about it. They say they believe the Word of God, but it has absolutely no effect on their thinking whatsoever; they sure don't tremble at it. They always seem to go off on some tangent about how God is love – and that's true – but, He's more than love; He's Holy — and He will punish sin. They never get around to that part.

Failure to recognize these things is the entire problem in a huge percentage of Christian lives. Ezra trembled at the Word of the Lord because of the transgressions of his people. How much do you *REALLY* believe the Bible today, friends? How much do you really obey God? How honestly involved are you in getting the Word of God out to the entire world? My Christian friends, it would pay you and I dividends to go before God where no one can see us and answer those questions privately. Can you go before God without trying to conceal something in your life? When you approach God, does your mind and soul stand naked before Him? As we read on, we see Ezra with his hands outspread; that means he wasn't hiding anything, and he wasn't holding back. The Lord Jesus said, *"if you love Me keep My commandments."* See, this thing has to actually mean something to us to be real and active in our life....

***<sup>5</sup> And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God,***

***<sup>6</sup> And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.***

~ Ezra says, *"our iniquities"* and *"our trespasses"* – he doesn't say *"their sins..."* Most modern-day Christians have divorced themselves from the church; and the church is in a very bad way, I grant that – but – it isn't *THEIR* sin; it is *OUR* sin! You can just write that down. We need to learn we are identified with the church; irrespective of whether or not we actually go to a church. If the church is in apostasy, then *WE* are in apostasy, my beloved. This isn't the problem of some group on the corner of your neighborhood; it's *YOUR* problem. It is I, oh, Lord, who stands in the need of prayer. My sin is ever before me.

See, Ezra knew what it meant to be a captive in a foreign land. Most likely, Ezra had been born in captivity, and he trembled when he recognized how devastating the judgment of God could be. There are *MANY* Christians who are under the severe judgment of God right *NOW* – I could give instance after instance and example after example. These people are in abject

spiritual poverty, literal emotional bankruptcy; and yet they deceive themselves with a rationale that their sins will receive impunity. They have no clue of their true present condition. Some of them will die in that condition. God extends mercy – yes – and there is no condemnation to those in Christ – I agree – but – God is a Holy God Who said *YOU WILL REAP WHAT YOU SOW*. It's too bad that more of us don't believe God and tremble at His Word....

***<sup>7</sup> Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day.***

***<sup>8</sup> And now for a little space grace hath been shewed 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.***

***<sup>9</sup> For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto 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 the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.***

***<sup>10</sup> And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments,***

***<sup>11</sup> Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness.***

***<sup>12</sup> Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever.***

***13 And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this;***

***14 Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?***

~ Verse eight is one of the most sincere verses in the Bible. God had allowed Israel to return to the land from that awful captivity in Babylon; and here they go off again immediately after the heathen in total and complete disobedience to the Lord. The very thing that sent them into captivity in the first place is being practiced again the moment they arrive back from captivity. In the midst of all of that, the “*nail*” in verse eight speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is truly remarkable. Praise God. Can you thank God that He is faithful today — even when you are unfaithful to Him? You might want to figure that out.

***Isaiah 22:***<sup>22</sup> *And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.*<sup>23</sup> *And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house ~*

God’s chosen people at the time we are studying didn’t lose their salvation over this; but they sure lost fellowship with God. And they almost lost everything else. They lost the blessings of God, and they lost their rewards. We have a whole bunch of saved people today who view themselves as super-duper saints; but they’ll have no reward in Heaven whatsoever. You may want to think about that, too; or – maybe you don’t care about these things? Well, I do. These people were asking for “... *a little revival in their bondage.*” But they weren’t in bondage any longer. How tragic.

The term “*revival*” isn’t actually a Bible word – it’s only used in a place such as verse eight. Even there, it isn’t “*revival*” but “*reviving*” – which is much more personal. The principle is there, but not in the popular meaning of the term. We think of a spiritual upsurge with sinners converted en masse and

renewing of interest for the things of the Spirit of God as revival. But that's inaccurate. Technically, it means to recover life or vigor and return to consciousness. It most adequately refers to that which already has life, but that life has gotten down to near death – when it is revived. So, the lost are excluded as they are dead in trespasses and sins.

Resurrection, in Romans chapter fourteen verse nine, is stated by saying, “... *He was revived.*” So, if we're going to be technical, and totally correct, we must confine the term “*revival*” to believers only in a spiritual sense. It helps to know what we are talking about when handling Holy Writ. Here, we have a *real* revival that is going to take place. Alright, our Spiritual Safari leaves off at this point in this leg of our expedition; but we'll resume and complete the book of Ezra in our next report. In the meantime, why not thoroughly consider this closing verse from Ezra's prayer? ~

***<sup>15</sup> O LORD God of Israel, thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee because of this ~***

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