

# Return from Exile

Ezra, Nehemiah and the Call to Excellence

Part 4 – Confession. October 23, 2016

*"And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, Ezra 9:10*

## The Story

Ezra 9-10



After all the preparations and a safe journey over hundreds miles and 5 month, Ezra and the returning wave of Israelites finally arrived in Jerusalem, likely brimming with eager anticipation of the new life ahead.

When these Jews arrived, they offered sacrifices to God at the temple and also delivered the king's edicts to the governors of those lands surrounding Judah (8:35-36).

It was after this that Ezra learned some very distressing news. From the time the temple had been completed until the arrival of Ezra and those who accompanied him (approximately 70 years), the spiritual state of the Jews had seriously declined

The local leaders came quickly and informed Ezra that the Jews had failed to keep themselves separated from the people of the lands around them as the Lord had commanded them. Surely there was significant erosion of their faith, devotion, and attention to the Law, resulting in widespread sin. What's worse is that the leaders and rulers were foremost among the offenders!

Ezra was stunned when he heard this report. He immediately began to mourn over these sins. He tore his garments and pulled some of the hair from his head (9:3). Those who were godly joined him in his mourning. Ezra's prayer is certainly a model prayer; it is the prayer of a godly leader in response to the sin of his people, found in Chapter 9.

In his prayer, we see several significant points:

1. Ezra identifies himself with these Jews, and with their sins. He does not say, "They have sinned," but rather, "We have sinned." He does not speak of their iniquity, but of our iniquity (see 9:6-7).
2. Ezra recognizes the intermarriage of the Jews with the people of the land as a clear violation of God's command, given in the law (see 9:12).
3. Ezra recognizes their sins as part of a consistent pattern of rebellion and disobedience, from the days of their forefathers to the present (9:7).

4. Ezra recognizes their present condition of slavery as the consequence of their sins, and the sins of their forefathers (9:7-13).
5. Ezra acknowledges that God has been gracious in dealing with their sins, for their judgment could have been much more severe (9:13).
6. Ezra acknowledges that in all of this God showed Himself to be righteous, while the Jews have shown themselves to be sinners.
7. Ezra casts himself and his people on his God, Who is gracious and compassionate.

Ezra did not immediately correct the sins of the people. He was still praying and confessing their sins when Shecaniah encouraged Ezra to act decisively in Chapter 10.

Shecaniah was apparently the spokesman for the large number of Jews who mourned with Ezra. Encouraged by the words of Shecaniah, Ezra took action. He sent word throughout Judah, summoning all the exiles to appear in Jerusalem within three days. Those who failed to do so would forfeit their property and their place among the people of God. As you might suspect, the Jews gathered in Jerusalem, as instructed.

What a scene that must have been. It was cold and raining heavily; the people were shivering. They trembled not only because of the cold, but because of their sins (10:9). Ezra rebuked the people for their sins and demanded that they separate themselves from the people of the land by putting away their foreign wives.

The people acknowledged that Ezra was right, but they appealed to him to modify the process by which this sin was to be corrected. It was cold and raining, and the matter would take a considerable amount of time to carry out. They asked that their leaders might represent them and that their sins might be dealt with on a local level, in their own cities. This could be done according to a schedule, so that it could be resolved in a reasonable amount of time (10:13-14). Nearly all agreed that this was the right thing to do, and Ezra records the names of those few who were dissenters (10:15) – and so this sin was dealt with. Those guilty were identified. Their names are listed for us to read, beginning with the priests and the Levites who had sinned in this manner (10:18-23). Some of those who had married foreign wives already had children by them (10:44).

\* Excerpts from Bible.org, commentary on Ezra 9

## **Application**

Why was the intermixing of the Jews and the impure peoples in the lands around them such a big sin?

Read Exodus 20:3-4. How did or could have that intermixing effected their devotion and purity towards God?

What other the impacts on Israel of their continued unrepentant, unconfessed sin? How did it effect their faith? Guilt?

What did they experience and do as a result of their confession?

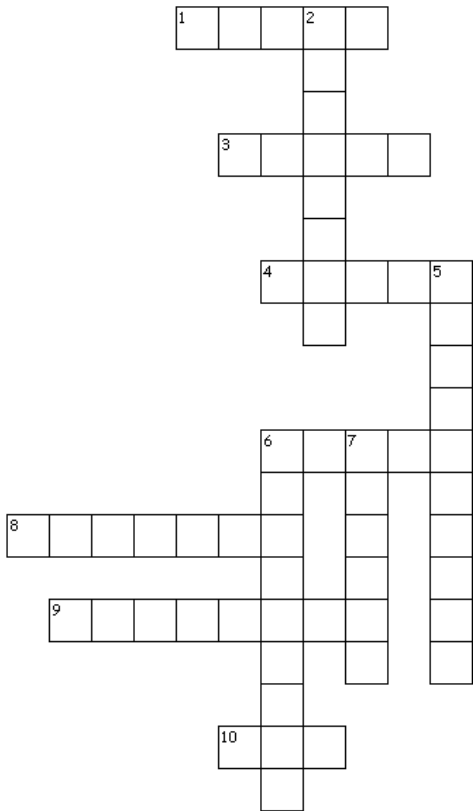
Is there unconfessed sin in your life you are rationalizing? How can that affect your faith and relationship with God?

Remembering that the overarching theme of the fall series is excellence, how does confession in your life improve excellence in your life? Related to your work ethic, moral excellence, ministry excellence, and missional excellence?

Why is being a more excellent Christian helpful to your ability to be salt and life in this world?

How can inviting accountability in your life help you improve in excellence?

**Return From Exile Crossword:  
Confession**



Across

- 1. A type of line you use to help you know something is straight.
- 3. Their sin eroded this of Israel's.
- 4. What Israel saw afresh when they confessed their sin.
- 6. The type of excellence related to our devotion to God and character.
- 8. Something you do to acknowledge your sin to God and others.
- 9. Key word for last week's message.
- 10. Ezra was skilled in this.

Down

- 2. The type of excellence related to what we do in service to the Body and to others.
- 5. The main theme word of the fall series.
- 6. Excellence in outreach to the lost.
- 7. What the Israelites did to remedy their situation after confessing.

Next Week ... Part 5 – Boldness

Crossword Solution:  
Across: 1. Plumb, 3. Faith, 4. Grace, 6. Missional, 8. Confess, 9. Devotion, 10. Law  
Down: 2. Ministry, 5. Excellence, 6. Missional, 7. Repent