

## THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

### **Ezra: Encouraging God's People Unto Spiritual Renewal II. God's Edifying Direction Amid National Unsettledness (Ezra 2:1-70)**

Introduction: (To show the need . . . )

In the wake of the recent election, we face significant national unsettledness:

(1) The editorial, "Challenge the vote counts" in the November 10, 2020 Republican-American, p. 10A, stated, "Americans need assurances that this election was conducted fairly. As of now, we are not confident such fairness characterized the election." Kimberly A. Strassel's column, "Harvesting the 2020 Election" in The Wall Street Journal, November 13, 2020, p. A13, gave some reasons why, claiming that ballot harvesting with millions of mail-in ballots made it "nearly impossible to prove fraud." She explained: "How many harvesters offered to deliver votes, only to throw away inconvenient ones? How many voters were pushed or cajoled, or even paid -- or had a ballot filled out and returned for them without their knowledge? And this is before questions on what other mischief went on amid millions of mailed ballots (which went to wrong addresses or deceased people) and reduced voter verification rules. As the Heritage Foundation's election expert Hans von Spakovsky has explained, mail-in voting is the 'single worst form of election possible' because 'it moves the entire election beyond the oversight of election officials,'" Ibid.

(2) The nation is accordingly politically and ideologically very divided: (a) Cal Thomas' column, "America is bipolar" (Republican-American, November 11, 2020, p. 10A), observed, "If Joe Biden survives recounts and several lawsuits filed by the Trump campaign into what President Trump says has been widespread vote-counting fraud (we await proof), do not expect him to be hounded over his and Hunter Biden's business ties to China and Ukraine, as Trump has been over 'Russian collusion' charges and numerous other attempts by Democrats, the left and the media to undermine his administration." (b) Karl Rove's op-ed, "The Election Result Won't Be Overturned" (Ibid., The Wall Street Journal, November 12, 2020, p. A17) noted, "Pundits predicted a blue tsunami of historic proportions that would carry Democrats" to dominate the presidency, the Senate and the House of Representatives. "Well, the White House changed hands. But none of the rest happened . . . Mr. Trump also won 26% of nonwhite voters, according to NBC's exit poll, driving commentators crazy . . . A New York Times columnist found it 'personally devastating' that many blacks and gays voted for the president," meaning that "U. S. politics remain polarized and venomous," Ibid.

(3) On top of all this, Veronique de Rugy's column, "No joy for fiscal conservatives" (Ibid., Republican-American, November 5, 2020, p. 10A) lamented, "Once again, Election Day in America has come and gone . . . Unfortunately, for those of us who prefer smaller government -- for those of us who value individual liberty as an end in itself," we won't experience "financial solvency or less government interference in our lives . . . (I)t is depressing."

Need: *So, we ask, "In facing national unsettledness after the election, what edifying direction does God offer us?"*

#### **I. Israel's exiles who returned from the Babylonian Captivity faced national unsettledness, Ezra 2:1-62:**

- A. A sadly low number of 74 Levites returned to Israel from Babylon due to spiritual waywardness in that tribe:
  - 1. Though 4,289 priests returned to Israel, only 74 Levites of their tribe came back with them, Ezra 2:36-40.
  - 2. Ezekiel 44:10-16 explains that the Levites had greatly influenced the people of Israel to forsake the Lord and follow idols, apparently the disturbing reason for their low number in the returning exiles.
- B. Some of the people and even some of the priests could not prove their Hebrew lineage, making their effort to be a part of the rebuilding of the nation a problem not only for them, but for everybody else, Ezra 2:59-62.
- C. Many towns in Israel lay damaged, uninhabited and deteriorating for decades after the Babylonian invasion, what compounded the workload of restoring the nation, The Carta Bible Atlas, 2002, p. 124-125, map 162.

#### **II. Yet, God had promised Israel restoration, so the returning exiles committed themselves to rebuilding:**

- A. Ezra 1:1 recalled Jeremiah's prophecies in Jeremiah 25:11-12 and 29:10 regarding the nations' restoration.
- B. The returning exiles thus believed those Biblical promises and committed themselves to rebuilding the nation:
  - 1. The exiles' Hebrew governor Zerubbabel (Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 656), bravely trusting God to bless the recovery effort though taking a stand, refused to let the priests who could not prove their lineage eat of the temple's holy foods until a priest with God's prophetic gifting arose to settle the matter, Ezra 2:63-64.
  - 2. The exiles sacrificially gave to rebuild the temple, Ezra 2:65-69: they gave 277,550 ounces of gold and 100,000 ounces of silver, half a billion dollars' worth in today's values, averaging \$11,850 in today's value per person of the 49,897 exiles who returned. ( Ibid., p. 658; Ryrie St. Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Ezra 2:69)
  - 3. The returning exiles worked hard to repair, clean and resettle Israel's ruined, long-vacant cities, Ezra 2:70.

**III. The reward for this commitment was the great encouragement it gave future generations of Hebrews who saw themselves represented by their forefathers in the list of exiles in the book of Ezra, *Ibid.*, p. 656.**

***Lesson:* Regardless of the national unsettledness they faced, the returning Hebrew exiles remained committed to trusting God and obeying His Word, what greatly encouraged future generations of their descendants.**

***Application:* (1) May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. (2) In facing national unsettledness today, may we believe and heed Scripture's promises and guidance for us in our era (as explained in the Conclusion below) for rich blessing.**

**Conclusion:** (To illustrate the message . . . )

Christ's Matthew 13:1-52 parables of the "Kingdom of heaven" provide predictions and guidance that directly apply to us with the national unsettledness we face today, so we study these parables for our edification (as follows):

(1) As background for this study, (a) though these parables are often said to predict the Church (Pentecost to the Rapture), they actually cover the entire period from Christ's rejection by Israel's leaders in Matthew 12:14-50 when He began to postpone His Messianic Kingdom down to Christ's Second Coming seven years after the Church is raptured and when Christ installs His Kingdom (Matthew 13:40-42), Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 45-51. (b) Also, the "Kingdom of heaven" title for these Matthew 13 parables appears only in Matthew's Gospel, and it refers to the combating reigns of God and Satan in the lower "heaven" of the atmosphere (Ephesians 2:2b; 6:12b ESV; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 49), which spiritual combat is very evident in several of the Matthew 13:1-52 parables.

(2) We thus interpret these parables (as follows): (a) The Sower - Most people worldwide will reject God's Word, and those who accept it will do so with varying degrees of spiritual productivity, Matthew 13:1-23. (b) The Wheat and the Tares (Weeds) - Satan will infiltrate groups of believers with unbelievers so as to counter God's discipling work. To protect weak believers from spiritual harm, God will not soon remove unbelievers from the midst of believers, but do so at Christ's return, Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43. (c) The Mustard Seed - With unbelievers mixed with believers, Satan will influence all their human institutions (church, business, government) to grow so large that Satan (the birds, v. 19, 32b) might more readily thwart God's work, Matthew 13:31-32. (d) The Leaven - Leaven in Matthew's Gospel spiritually always means false teaching (cf. Matthew 16:5-12), so institutions already relationally compromised with unbelievers will become thoroughly corrupted with errant beliefs, Matthew 13:33. (e) The Hid Treasure - This treasure, first owned and used but then hid, is the "old, worn" (*palaios*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 610) truths of the scribe's Scriptures in Matthew 13:52b -- the Old Testament. Thus, godly teachers will make every effort to acquire Old Testament truths of Christ's Kingdom, Matthew 13:44. (f) The Pearl of Great Price - This treasure, new and for sale in the marketplace, is the "new, unused" (in Christ's day; *kainos*, *Ibid.*, p. 394-395) truths of the scribe's Scriptures in Matthew 13:52b -- the New Testament. Thus, godly teachers will make every effort to acquire New Testament truths of Christ's Kingdom, Matthew 13:45-46. (g) The Dragnet - Jesus said this parable predicts God's separation of believers from unbelievers at His Second Coming, what is to lead godly teachers not to fret over seeing Satan's spiritual contamination of human institutions, Matthew 13:47-50. (h) The Householder - Jesus in Matthew 13:51 implied that this parable is based on all the previous ones, so godly "scribes," that is, godly Bible teachers today, are to stay committed to expounding Old and New Testament truths on Christ's Kingdom regardless of Satanic activities in human institutions to oppose them. If these teachers stay committed to this calling, God will greatly reward them in eternity, what Jesus taught in Matthew 13:43 and God's angel in Daniel 12:3-4 explained: this angel claimed that in the Great Tribulation, "many will eagerly, quickly go [polel (intensive verbal stem) of *shut*, "go; rove about," B. D. B., A Heb.-Eng. Lex. of the O. T., p. 1001-1002; in this stem, *shut* means "go eagerly, quickly, to and fro," *Ibid.*], and in the context of knowledge increasing (Dan. 12:4c), it means "eagerly, quickly peruse to [the New Testament] and fro [the Old Testament]" **Scriptures**, seeking desired, Biblical, prophetic knowledge about what they will then be facing under the duress of the Great Tribulation Period!

(3) Applied to **us**, the national unsettledness we face today is the result of Satan's infiltration of man's church, business and government institutions with unbelievers so as to corrupt those institutions with errant beliefs and thus to thwart God's discipling work. God wants us to realize that for the spiritual welfare of weak believers, He will not immediately stop these satanic efforts lest doing so would shock weak believers, hurting their discipleship, but He will separate the saved from the unsaved in the end. So, instead of fretting over Satan's corruptive work, we must stay committed to presenting Old and New Testament truths that disciple others, what God will richly reward in eternity!

**May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. May we then remain committed Scripture's promises and guidance for our era for God's blessing.**