

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Ezra: Encouraging God's People Unto Spiritual Renewal

IV. Guarding Ourselves From Destructive Corruption

(Ezra 4:1-3 et al.)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Many people today are concerned about their vulnerability to destructive corruption on several fronts:

(1) In a letter to the Republican-American, December 28, 2020, p. 8A, R. N. Collins of Plantsville, Connecticut lamented, "I fear the United States has lost its way! In government, party has replaced country as the highest priority. Decency and truth have been replaced by win at any cost. The country drifts toward lawlessness."

(2) To illustrate why he and many others think this way, (a) we cite the lead editorial, "Will Mr. Biden say yes or no?" on the same page that claimed, ". . . President-elect Joe Biden" has been "inconsistent on 'court-packing,' . . . increasing the number of seats on the U. S. Supreme Court to bring supposed ideological balance into the judiciary . . . [However,] 'court-packing' would open the door to chaos. Once a single piece of 'court-packing' legislation is approved, each major political party assuredly will be emboldened to expand the Supreme Court when it is unhappy with the high court. There is no telling how large the court would get," undermining the court's credibility.

(b) Last week, I heard a radio talk show host critique the government stimulus package, saying it increases the national debt, but that many people need far more cash than just the \$600, yet that much of the stimulus is going to institutions that are not even in need of livelihood assistance. The talk show host saw it all as a dysfunctional mess!

(3) We face vulnerability to destructive corruption in some evangelical circles: (a) the article, "How Does Genesis Affect My View Of Dominion?" in the October-December, 2020 issue of Answers magazine, p. 42, cited biologist Dr. Gordon Wilson as saying, "In my book A Different Shade Of Green, my main objective is to encourage Christians to obey the dominion mandate found in Genesis." To my knowledge, Dr. Wilson and the Answers In Genesis ministry that publishes the Answers magazine do *not* teach "Dominion theology," the view that God gave Adam His legal authority over the earth in Genesis 1:26, 28, that Satan usurped that dominion in tempting Adam and Eve to sin, and that the Church is God's instrument to take that dominion back from Satan and gain control of the earth's government and social institutions. (Brannon Howse, Rel. Trojan Horse, 2012, p. 105-106) In contrast to "Dominion theology," our Church holds to premillennialism, believing that Christ will establish His Kingdom at His Second Coming to the earth, that the Church does *not* set up that Kingdom, but rather disciples individuals for Christ. Thus, for Answers magazine to cite a biologist who urges "Christians to obey the dominion mandate in Genesis" with no theological clarification of that urging opens the door for its readers to fall for errant "Dominion theology"!

(b) A Church member recently told me that he witnessed a professor at my alma mater, Dallas Theological Seminary, teach that one is unloving to take a stand against fellow evangelicals who say there are millions of years in Genesis 1-2. Yet, in Exodus 20:8-11, Moses wrote that the solar week Sabbath Day observance was based on his Genesis 1-2 creation account, so claiming that Genesis 1-2 contains millions of years makes Moses contradict himself at Exodus 20:8-11, countering the divine inspiration of his writings! Then, Jesus in Matthew 19:4-6 cited Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 as God's inspired Word, so if Moses' writings err, Jesus erred in implying that they taught God's truth, making Jesus out to be a sinner and disqualifying Him from being our Savior to the fall of the entire Christian faith!

Need: *So, we ask, "What should we do about our vulnerability to destructive corruption?!"*

I. The returning Hebrew exiles faced the threat of destructive corruption in rebuilding the temple:

- A. When the enemies of the Hebrews heard that the Hebrews were building the Jerusalem temple, they offered to help, claiming they worshipped the same God ever since Assyria's king had relocated them there, Ezra 4:1-2.
- B. To explain, when Assyria conquered Israel, they "deported some of the people . . . to Assyria and brought in other peoples to intermarry" with the remaining Hebrews (2 Kings 17:23-24) to prevent "strong nationalistic uprisings" in the conquered land, Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 660. In time, the intermarriage of Hebrews and Gentiles produced "Samaritans" with their syncretism of paganism and the worship of God, 2 Kings 17:29-41.
- C. Since the returning Hebrew exiles intended to heed Scripture and worship God alone, rebuilding their nation around that pure faith, the Samaritans saw the Hebrews as a threat to their land holdings as a people of mixed heritage and syncretized religion, so they tried to infiltrate the Hebrew ranks to sabotage their work, *Ibid.*

II. The Hebrews overcame this threat by heeding Scripture, refusing to let the Samaritans help them:

- A. The Hebrew leaders told the Samaritans, "[It is] *not* for you **and** for us" (*lo-lakem walanu*) to build a temple to God, but "we ourselves (emphatic pronoun '*anahnu*)" will do so; Kittel, Bib. Heb., p. 1289; Ezra 4:3a.

- B. The Hebrews added that Persia's king Cyrus had ordered them to rebuild their Jerusalem temple, Ezra 4:3b.
- C. However, referring to Cyrus' decree **ALSO** aligned with God's will as expressed in **Scripture** (as follows):
1. Around 700 B. C., 200 + years before this, Isaiah had predicted in Isaiah 44:28 that **God** would raise up a pagan king named "Cyrus" as "My shepherd" to call for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple! (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Intro. to the Book of Isaiah," p. 968; *Ibid.*, "Intro. to the Book of Ezra," p. 701)
 2. This prophecy occurred after God had condemned Judah's idolatry in Isaiah 1:1-12:6, which sin had led to the Babylonian Captivity and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in God's judgment.
 3. Cyrus had since come to power and ordered the Hebrews to return to Israel to rebuild the temple, and that after Israel's judgment by God for idolatry. Thus, the returning Hebrew exiles knew that God wanted them to rebuild their temple without **any** pagan corruption -- including the Samaritan syncretism with paganism!

III. In heeding Scripture, the Hebrews thus avoided the destructive corruption of the Samaritans.

Lesson: *When threatened with destructive corruption by the Samaritans in building the temple, the Hebrews heeded Scripture, delivering themselves from the Samaritans' destructive corruption.*

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) May we cleave closely to God's revealed will in Scripture to avoid destructive corruption in our spiritual walk.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

On each issue in our introduction, we can closely heed Scripture to avoid destructive corruption (as follows):

(1) On R. N. Collins' letter lamenting how he feared that the United States had lost its way in abandoning upright priorities, decency, truth and lawfulness, Psalm 119:105 asserts that Scripture is a lamp to our feet and a light unto our path in life. Following Scripture each step we believers take gives us all the insight and direction we need.

(2) On the potential threat of "court-packing" the U. S. Supreme Court to promote some ideology, (a) Romans 13:1 teaches that regardless how many people end up on the court, when, and what ideology they support, such would occur **ONLY** if God permitted it to happen! Thus, **our** concern is simply to keep focused on what Scripture directs us to do in whatever government situation we face, trusting God is at work to fulfill His plans! (b) Second, we know that since God plans to provide great influence for the overcomer(s) He will raise up from today's Church (Revelation 3:21), God may want to allow the credibility of leaders in various institutions to decline sharply in order to create a large vacuum of trust in the public that will be necessary to make His overcomer(s) most influential. Our part then is simply to keep focused on Christ in living that He might use us to fill that vacuum of trust if and when He so desires!

(3) On the issue of the stimulus, (a) we recall that God may use the government's dysfunctional mishandling of taxpayers' moneys to feed the public's growing distrust of officials in order to enhance the future impact of God's overcomer(s). (b) Besides, Hebrews 13:5-6 directs us not to covet, but to rely on God as our Helper in meeting our livelihood needs. (c) 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 also directs us to avoid being dependent on other human entities for our livelihoods, including the government, but to do our own work independently to avoid being in any material need.

(4) On the issue of "Dominion theology," Hebrews 2:8b teaches that God has not yet subjected everything to man, including even to Jesus, for nature is still under the Adamic curse (Romans 8:18-23; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 784). God gave Adam a stewardship as God's subordinate to manage the creation, but He did **not** hand His divine authority over the earth to Adam like "Dominion theology" teaches. Yes, we Christians should treat the environment well as good **stewards** of God's creation, but we do not possess God's authoritative **dominion** over the earth!

(5) On the issue of belief in long ages in Genesis 1-2, Harvard Professor Donald Buchanan Gray, The Forms of Heb. Poetry, 1915 (reprint 1972), p. 52, taught that the "waw consecutive," today known as the waw consecutive (J. Weingreen, A Pract. Gram. for Class. Hebrew, 1939 (reprint 1969), p. 91), a grammatical construction that indicates an uninterrupted sequence of events in narrative literature (*Ibid.*, Gray; Allen P. Ross, A Heb. Handbk., 1975, p. 51), runs from Genesis 1:3 down to Genesis 1:26. This passage includes the six days of creation. The waw consecutive here thus means that there are no intervening eras of long ages between each of the six days, nor that Genesis 1:3-26 can be treated as poetry to be interpreted figuratively to include long ages of time for each "day," but that each of the six days of creation consisted of an evening and a morning as a solar day, and that those days occurred in one solar week! Genesis 1-2 thus teaches pure creation, it harmonizes with the Exodus 20:8-11 witness that creation occurred in one solar week, it supports Jesus' use of Genesis 1-2 as God's true Word and thus it supports the Christian faith!

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 closely heed God's revealed will in Scripture to avoid destructive corruption.