

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Ezra: Encouraging God's People Unto Spiritual Renewal

I. Personal Triumph After National Defeat

(2 Chronicles 36:22-Ezra 1:11)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Many people fear that the results of the national elections may harm them, the nation and even the world:

(1) A letter by Daniel Oliveira of Wolcott, Connecticut claimed, "Anarchist groups with Marxist leanings are allowed to destroy property to the tune of \$2 billion, and accost and injure with relative impunity," so "(p)lease consider" voting for "candidates who will protect the Constitution, ensure our right of free speech, and protect the 'domestic tranquility' described by the Constitution." (Republican-American, October 23, 2020, p. 10A)

(2) Another letter from Wolcott by Frederick Townsend expressed fear that if one of the political parties gains control of the government in the election, it would "impose socialist policies on the American population, run the country for the benefit of a rich, elite, ruling class, without regard for our constitutional rights" and "increase our taxes to pay for self-serving, irresponsible spending that enriches socialist allies . . ." (Ibid., October 24, 2020, p. 10A)

(3) Many evangelicals are also concerned: evangelical psychologist Dr. James Dobson's October, 2020 form letter from his Family Institute ministry to "800,000 people" declared, ". . . (W)e are approaching another presidential election that carries enormous implications for the stability of our democratic system of government . . . For centuries, America has stood as a shining light for liberty and freedom in our nation and around the globe. If we abandon our founding core values, the world will suffer for it. The binary choice before us is that stark."

Need: *So, we ask, "How can we handle the results of next Tuesday's elections if they turn out to be foreboding?!"*

I. As we learned in our last message in this series, God punished Judah's sins by leading the Babylonians to invade Judah, kill many of its people and take its survivors captive to Babylon, 2 Chronicles 36:11-20.

II. However, God's Spirit later stirred up various people to restore the captive Hebrews to their homeland:

- A. After Persia had conquered Babylon, God's Spirit stirred up Persia's king Cyrus to issue a decree urging the Hebrews in his realm to return to their land and rebuild their temple, 2 Chronicles 36:21-Ezra 1:4:
1. 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 is identical to Ezra 1:1-2 (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to 2 Chron. 36:22), and we note that Ezra 1:1-2 reports how the God of heaven stirred up the spirit of Persia's king Cyrus to desire to see the temple of God in Jerusalem rebuilt and its worship restored.
 2. Cyrus did not truly believe in Israel's God, but the Cyrus Cylinder (538 B. C.) that archaeologists have found reports that he hoped to please the gods of the captured peoples in his realm by repatriating them to their homelands and rebuilding their temples so that their gods might pray to his gods Bel and Marduk requesting that his gods bless his reign, Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 654.
 3. Persia's Cyrus then urged the captive Hebrews in his kingdom to return to Jerusalem and rebuild its temple, ordering Gentile countries around Israel under Persia's rule to give silver, gold and other materials necessary to help the returning Hebrews rebuild their temple and restore its worship, Ezra 1:3-4.
- B. God's Spirit also stirred up Hebrews in Persia to heed Cyrus' call to relocate to the land of Israel, Ezra 1:5.
- C. The Lord evidently also motivated Gentile neighbors of the Hebrew captives in Persia to donate material goods to these Hebrews to help them move and relocate in their homeland, Ezra 1:6.
- D. Cyrus also retrieved vessels that Babylon's king Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Jerusalem temple and stored in Babylon and gave them to the Hebrews who planned to return to Jerusalem, Ezra 1:7-11.

III. This divine restoration of Judah's people fulfilled Bible prophecies (as follows):

- A. Nearly one hundred and fifty years before Cyrus' decree, decades before he was born and the Hebrews had been taken captive to Babylon, God's prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1, 13 had mentioned Cyrus by name and predicted that he would restore the Hebrew captives to their homeland. (Ibid., p. 655)
- B. Also, before Babylon captured Jerusalem, God's prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 29:10 predicted that the captive Hebrews would return to their land after 70 years, and from the date that the first group of Hebrews were taken to Babylon in the spring of 605 B. C. (Z. P. E. B., v. Four, p. 395) to the laying of the temple foundation by returning Hebrews in the spring of 535 B. C. (Ibid., Ryrie, fn. to Ezra 3:8) was *exactly* 70 years!

Lesson: *After national apostasy and God's resulting destructive punishment of the nation of Judah, what led to its national captivity, God's Spirit stirred up various people to fulfill Bible prophecies on the restoration of the nation.*

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) *To handle fears about the coming election, may we rely on the Holy Spirit to fulfill Bible prophecies that are relevant to the current events we face and (3) heed God's will for us in our era for God's blessing (as we explain in the "Conclusion" section below).*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

To apply this sermon, we examine Scripture to understand God's prophecies and will for us in our current era:

(1) 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 reveals that Satan is the god of this world, 1 John 5:19 NIV claims that the whole world system is under Satan's control and Matthew 4:8-9 adds that Satan controls all the nations of the world, what would include our country today! Thus, just like 2 Timothy 3:13 and 4:3-4 predicted, many people are now moving further and further away from Scripture's God and His truth, going from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. We should thus not be shocked to see human institutions that are composed of such people continue to deteriorate.

(2) Regardless of this apostasy, Scripture directs us to remain optimistic: (a) first, Romans 13:1-4 claims that every government official who comes to power is ordained of God to rule! (b) Second, 1 John 4:4 claims that the Holy Spirit Who indwells us believers in Christ is greater than Satan who is in the world, so we can rely on the Holy Spirit by faith for thought and behavior control, applying Galatians 5:16, 22-23 at all times to overcome anxiety, depression and spiritual defeat. (c) Third, since Scripture ministers to nurture the soul with God's guidance on what to think and how to do so (cf. Psalm 1:1-6), we believers in Christ should partake of God's spiritual nurture by exposing our minds daily to Bible reading and/or Bible study. (cf. 1 Peter 2:2-3; Deuteronomy 17:18-20) (d) Fourth, in Matthew 16:18, Jesus promised to build His true Church, that the "gates of Hades," either the ruling powers of evil or physical death (J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 252), would not prevail against it. Even in our era, then, regardless what we face, God promises to keep on building His true Church. Consequently, participating in a local, Biblical church and using our spiritual gift for serving God to minister to other believers and be blessed by their ministries to us is an essential, productive practice for each of us to perform. (Ephesians 4:11-16)

(3) Also, God has a prophetic message uniquely for us in our era of Church History, and we explain it (as follows): (a) We recall from past studies in the Book of Revelation that God's message to the Laodicean Church in Revelation 3:14-22 predicted and addressed the evangelical Church from A. D. 1950 to the rapture. (b) We also learned that Revelation 3:21 in that passage presents Christ as promising today's "overcomer" who lives by faith in the Holy Spirit's power and expounds Scripture **figuratively** to sit "in" (*en* in the Greek text) Christ's earthly Davidic throne with Him, namely, having great influence in the Church and world through Christ. (c) We learned this reward includes one's being given an influential ministry in expounding Scripture to nurture those who face a time of trouble in our era akin to Christ's ministry to saints who will come out of the future Great Tribulation. Thus, there is a Mini-Great Tribulation in our era of Church History. (cf. Revelation 7:13-17) (d) So, God is letting a Mini-Great Tribulation occur today with some natural instability (fires, storms, pandemics, earthquakes, social unrest, etc.) and oppression by leaders in various human institutions to motivate wayward believers to return to trust in Him versus trusting in human institutions, in money, etc., and to convince unbelievers of their need to trust in Christ for salvation of the soul, John 3:16. (e) Revelation 3:21 with 7:17 implies that oppressed, disillusioned people worldwide will thus seek balm from their trials and find it by salvation in Christ followed by the ongoing nurturing exposition of Scripture as presented in Bible-teaching churches. (f) Church leaders are thus to expound Scripture to administer balm to the needy and those in the pew are to apply Bible teaching in life and minister to one another for blessing. (Eph. 4:11-16)

(4) In view of the current need for balm in believers in Christ who see troublesome people running for office in the elections with the possibility that such candidates might win election and rule oppressively, we offer the following translation from the Hebrew text of God's message on such an issue in Psalm 37:1-8 (as follows): "(1) [A psalm] Of David. Do not fret yourself over evil men; do not be envious of those who practice actions against what is right. (2) Because like the grass they will quickly wither; and like green plants they will wither and drop their foliage. (3) Trust in Yahweh [the Lord] and practice what is wholesome; settle down in the land and feed on His faithfulness. (4) Delight yourself in Jahweh and He will give you the petitions of your heart. (5) Commit to Yahweh your way (of life) and trust upon Him and it is He (emphatic pronoun) who will perform it. (6) And He will cause your righteousness to shine like the dawn, and the justice of your cause as the noonday sun. (7) Be still before Jahweh, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret yourself when a man prospers in his way, when a nobleman practices wicked devices. (8) Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret yourself -- it leads only to evil."

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 trust God the Holy Spirit to fulfill God's Biblical prophecies regarding our era and live in accord with His plan for us in personal spiritual victory.