

THRU THE BIBLE SYNTHESIS
"Part XXX: Ezra - Starting Over Well After Group Failure"

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

(1) The April-May, 1996 issue of Israel My Glory published by the Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry reports that the city of Bethlehem is increasingly becoming indwelt by militant Islamics to the extent that Christian Arabs are fleeing the city of their origins for fear of reprisals as "traitors" to the Islamic faith. Though Bethlehem "is definitely not a Muslim (holy) city" in any stretch of the imagination, Arab Christians are being forced out and even Jews are being threatened by Islamic militants for visiting Rachel's tomb there, p. 7.

Is it possible to reconstruct a nation of peace and blessing on the international scene amidst such ungodliness and deception?!

(2) An article in a Moody Monthly magazine several years back reported that a pastor was asked by his church board to witness to a wealthy, generous donor in the church they knew was not saved. When the pastor did so, the unbeliever got upset and stopped giving, so the board fired the pastor! **Can that church be salvaged?!**

(3) Doug Erlandson, a former pastor and college professor, reports in the May, 1991 issue of Confident Living, a magazine published by Back to the Bible Broadcast of seeking to minister to the son of Christian parents he knew. The young man was hospitalized with a serious ailment, but was wayward from the faith.

When pastor Erlandson arrived, he talked and started to share the gospel. The young man, named Walter, seemed uninterested. Sensing that further talk would be futile, Doug asked if he could pray with him. When the young man didn't respond, he started to pray anyway. Doug reports: "As I prayed, Walter turned up the volume on his television. In all my years in the ministry, this was the first time anyone had ever done such a thing. Even in his hour of need, Walter maintained a low opinion of prayer." Two weeks later, Walter was dead and Doug Erlandson conducted his funeral. (Ibid., "Ministering to the Parents of Prodigals," Erlandson, p. 4-9.)

Is it possible to reconstruct such broken family ties as this?!

What is an individual to do when he sees his government, his church, his family and marriage unravel and he is just an individual, unable to control others?! WHAT CAN HE DO?!

(We turn to the "Need" section of the message . . .)

Need: "When even 'Christian' institutions like our nation or local ones like marriages, families and churches DECAY, it causes me deep concern! I am only one person, but it takes godliness in the OTHER parties to restore institutions like these! CAN these be MENDED, and, if so, HOW?! What's MY role in the process?!"

- I. **When Israel failed in her calling to counter Nimrod's apostasy and God judged her by national captivity, her marriage, family, temple worship and government institutions ALL decayed in captivity.**
 - A. Though God created the world and set man up as His deputy, sin deposed him, and Satan became ruler on earth, Gn. 1-5; 2 Cor. 4:4.
 - B. The Lord renewed history through the Noahic flood, Gen. 6:1-9:7.
 - C. Yet, Noah's descendant, Nimrod, began an apostasy opposing God's rule on earth, Gen. 10:8-10; 11:1-9; Rev. 12:1-3.
 - D. God thus chose Abraham to start a nation to check his sin, Gn. 12:1-3.
 - E. Yet, after many challenges en route, that nation failed to curb Nimrod's error, and God had to send it into captivity, Gn. 12:4-Daniel.
 - F. After Israel's 70-year predicted captivity (Jer. 25:12), God moved King Cyrus to decree the return of Israel to Palestine, Ez. 1:1-4.
 - G. However, the nation came back to a wrecked capitol and temple minus a Davidic king and married Gentiles in Scriptural ignorance, B.K.C., O.T., p. 651-697. Its corporate **institutions** were **BANKRUPT!**
- II. **The book of Ezra records the following RECONSTRUCTION of Israel's institutions of marriage, family, temple and government:**
 - A. **First, GOD sovereignly worked in hearts** to get the renewal going:
 1. Israel's reconstruction **started** with **GOD** moving the heart of Persia's **king**, Cyrus to **decree** Israel's **return** to the land, Ez. 1:1-4.
 2. Then **GOD** worked in the hearts of socially recognized **leaders** of the **Hebrews** to return to **rebuild** the Jerusalem temple, Ez. 1:5.
 3. Then **GOD** moved **others** to supply **finances**, including Cyrus who restored the sacred vessels for the temple construction, 1:5-8; 2:68.
 4. It was easy for other godly Hebrews to fall in line with these men.
 - B. **Second**, the people of God took **stands of holiness**: When a question arose about a family group's priestly lineage, this group was **omitted** from temple service until God clearly defined their ancestry, 2:61-63!
 - C. **Third**, the returning captives resettled in their own towns, taking up the places allotted to them by God under Joshua of old, Ez. 2:70.

- D. **Fourth**, the people under their God-motivated leaders unitedly rebuilt the altar of the temple and began corporate worship around it, 3:1-6.
- E. **Fifth**, while worshipping, they began rebuilding the temple, 3:7, 10.
- F. **Sixth**, when opposition from strong enemies arose to this work, God raised up prophets to encourage the people to keep working, Ez. 4-6.
- G. **Seventh**, once the temple was rebuilt, God sent the gifted, learned scribe and priest, Ezra to Jerusalem to instruct the people in God's Word, Ez. 7-8. Under him, the people put away their Gentile marriage partners to preserve family lines in accord with the Law, chs. 9-10.

III. **Ezra contributes to the "thread of redemption" theme by recording God's continued preservation of His salvation plan for the world:**

- A. **Two hundred years BEFORE** the event, Isaiah predicted **CYRUS** would **restore** Jerusalem and its temple, Isaiah 44:24-45:3! This prediction was to show **GOD'S intent** to **preserve Israel**, Isa. 45:4-5!
- B. Thus, the book of Ezra records the fulfillment of this divine resolve.
- C. In sustaining **Israel**, God upheld the Abrahamic Covenant, Gn. 12:1-3.
- D. In upholding the Abrahamic Covenant, God preserved **our salvation**, for salvation in Christ comes by means of that covenant, Gal. 3:13-14.

Application: *To reconstruct failed marital, family, church or government institutions, we must take a two-tiered approach: (1) ON THE CORPORATE FRONT, We must TRUST GOD to motivate the OTHER necessary leader(s) and donor(s) of needed resources to get STARTED well what fits HIS will as institutions go (Ezra 1:1-5) AND for GOD to KEEP SUPPLYING what leaders and resources the institution(s) in question need(s) to KEEP GOING well, Ezra chs. 4-10! (2) ON THE OTHER, PERSONAL front, we EACH must (a) believe on Christ as Savior from sin to fit into God's Abrahamic Covenant plan, Acts 17:30; Jn. 3:16; Gal. 3:13-14. (b) Then, we are blessed by ((1)) cleansing via confession of sin to God (1 Jn. 1:9) and ((2)) relying on the Holy Spirit (Ga. 5:16-23) to ((3)) obey Scripture, 1 Jn. 2:1-6. (c) Next, we follow Ezra's layout for PERSONAL roles in institutional renewal: ((1)) PERSONALLY we must take stands on purity (Ez. 2:61-63). ((2)) PERSONALLY we serve in our God-given tasks as leader(s) or follower(s), (Ez. 2:70). ((3)) PERSONALLY we regularly worship with others as God instructs us in He. 10:25 (Ez. 3:1-6). ((4)) PERSONALLY we donate resources WE afford, Ez. 1:4.*

Lesson: *CORPORATELY, God is sovereignly achieving His goals for His people's advance no matter what obstacles lie in that pathway, Mtt. 16:18. Yet, we are blessed PERSONALLY ONLY by faith and obedience to Him.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

Elizabeth Erlandson interviewed a woman named Naomi in the May 1991 issue of Back to the Bible Broadcast's Confident Living on her testimony as a restored prodigal.

Naomi was reared in a Bible believing church by God-fearing parents. Her mother was loving, but her father was very strict, so Naomi looked forward to the day when she could leave home and do what she wanted and have some **fun!**

When she left home, she married an unsaved sailor during the Korean War, living a wild and carefree life.

However, her first son died at five weeks of age from brain damage. Her second son was stillborn, and her third child, Lisa, was diagnosed with cancer at age 15! After Lisa died, she came back to the Lord in earnest!

In the process, Naomi's parents died in a car crash in 1961. She got back into a godly church, straightened out her life with the Lord, and brought her fourth child, Lori up with a balance of love and guidance in God's ways.

At the time the article was printed, Lori and her husband and three children were preparing to serve the Lord on the mission field, much to Naomi's joy.

Her testimony? "God didn't give up on me. I gave up on Him. It took a good many years for me to come back, but God is faithful . . . Jeremiah 33:3 has meant a lot to me: 'Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.' . . . I really think the Lord has other mighty things in store for me, things that I don't know about yet."

Apart from her parents, apart from others in a church, Naomi came back to God although she tried her hardest to hide from Him because GOD HAS A PROGRAM! Through trial after trial, she came back and now is full of joy at what is happening to her own daughter's family!

God is Almighty. All we need to do is watch our own lives and pray for others around us to see God proceed with His own agenda to keep the institutions of church, marriage, home, etc. rebounding and going forward for His glory . . .