

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION
Ezra: Encouraging God's People Unto Spiritual Renewal
VI. Handling Widespread Lawlessness
(Ezra 7:1-28)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Right now, we are witnessing widespread lawlessness and injustice in society:

(1) Josh Hammer's column, "If Trump really cares . . ." (Republican-American, January 9, 2021, p. 8A) told of "(t)he ignominious events in Washington, D. C." when a "mob" of the president's supporters breached the "Capitol."

(2) However, he also noted that "(h)ypocrisy . . . abounds," for "partisan Democrats and their sycophantic media mouthpieces . . . only *now* condemn anarchic mayhem . . . following their systemic refusal to do so amid last summer's harrowing, monthslong antifa/Black Lives Matter riotous rampage across the nation's urban corridors," Ibid.

(3) The biggest debate on lawlessness right now is President Trump's actions when some of his supporters breached the U. S. Capitol at the loss of five lives. (a) Former assistant attorney general of the District of Columbia Jeffrey Scott Shapiro in his op-ed, "No, Trump Isn't Guilty Of Incitement" (The Wall Street Journal, January 11, 2021, p. A17) wrote that though "House Democrats . . . drafted an article of impeachment that accuses President Trump of 'incitement to insurrection'," the "President didn't commit incitement or any other crime." Indeed, "(f)ormer federal prosecutor Andy McCarthy" explained that "an incitement case is very difficult in criminal court . . . You have to intend that a violent crime take place." (Marc Thiessen, "Impeachment gamesmanship," Ibid., Republican-American, January 13, 2021, p. 8A) (b) However, Mr. McCarthy added, "(T)he issue of impeachment" in President Trump's case "is not" that of "criminal liability, but whether the president committed what Alexander Hamilton described as political offenses that call into question his fitness for office," and columnist Marc Thiessen explained: "President Trump . . . might not have intended for his supporters to storm the building, but . . . (i)nstead of immediately rushing to the cameras to call off his supporters, Trump sat back and watched them ransack the Capitol," and "nearly three hours into the assault . . . [he] posted a video telling his supporters 'you have to go home now,'" Ibid.

(4) Actually, (a) Vice President-elect Kamala Harris would be guilty of the "'incitement to insurrection'" charge the House leveled against President Trump: "(i)n June 2020, in the aftermath of the nationwide rioting," she "predicted the protests" were "'not gonna let up **and they should not.**" (Matt Margolis, "Kamala Harris Called BLM Protests 'a Movement' Last Summer, Said 'They Should not' Stop," January 7, 2021; pjmedia.com; emphases ours) Those riots were fueled by Black Lives Matter, an organization led by Marxists who are committed to undermining our personal liberties (Ibid.; Brannon S. Howse, Marxianity, 2018, p. 179; "Some Background on the Black Lives Matter Organization," June 7, 2020, targetliberty.com), and the riots produced "dozens of deaths." (Ibid., Margolis) (b) Then, President-elect Joe Biden would be guilty of an offense that would call into question his fitness for office: during last summer's BLM riots that his party permitted for its interests that also destroyed city centers and cost dozens of lives, he did not clearly condemn the riots until it was politically necessary. If President Trump is unfit for office for delaying for hours his call for supporters to go home at the cost of five lives, President-elect Biden is unfit for office for delaying for weeks his effort to end the riots that supported his party's interests and cost dozens of lives.

(4) Also, The Wall Street Journal lead editorial, "The Progressive Purge Begins" (Ibid. p. A16) reported, "After Wednesday's mob invasion of the Capitol . . . big tech firms have moved, aggressively and in unison, against Donald Trump and his supporters," banning access to the Big Tech platforms, but that "firms that dominate the flow of information in the U. S. and censor at the behest of powerful Democrats also deserve First Amendment scrutiny."

This issue has led our Deacon Board to consider what to do if Big Tech forces our web site off of the Internet!

Need: *So, we ask, "How would God have us respond to the widespread lawlessness and injustice we witness?!"*

- I. **Persia's king Artaxerxes decreed that the Hebrews not rebuild Jerusalem until he said otherwise, for he was led by the Hebrews' foes to believe that they might become rebellious against his rule, Ezra 4:7-22.**
- II. **Later, Artaxerxes gave the Hebrew scribe Ezra, an expert in the Hebrew Scriptures, permission to go to Jerusalem to promote the worship of Israel's God and to teach Israel her Scriptures, Ezra 7:1-26:**
 - A. The king gave the skilled Hebrew scribe Ezra all he requested to move from Persia to Jerusalem, Ezra 7:1-10.
 - B. Artaxerxes also ordered that all the Hebrews in Persia who desired to do so could go with Ezra as he took back vessels that belonged to their temple and supplies for the advancement of the temple worship, Ezra 7:11-20.
 - C. Artaxerxes also decreed that the Persian tax collectors in Syria-Palestine fund what Ezra thought he needed for the welfare of the temple that Artaxerxes might be consequently blessed by Israel's God, Ezra 7:21-23.

- D. The Persian king added that all involved in the Jerusalem temple ministry be exempt from taxation, Ezra 7:24.
- III. **Artaxerxes also charged Ezra to appoint officials he could train to administer justice and establish law and order in accord with the Hebrew Scriptures and Persian law, and to teach those Scriptures, Ezra 7:25. The king also gave Ezra authority to enforce the observance of these laws, Ezra 7:26.**
- IV. **The king thus made this decree believing that the Hebrew Scriptures would influence the Hebrew people to be lawful and orderly in accord with even Persian law. This knowledge was possessed by Artaxerxes' seven counselors who knew the Jewish Scriptures well, who also had regard for them and who highly recommended them to the king, Ezra 7:14 with Ibid., Ryrie, ftn. to Esther 1:14.**
- V. **Indeed, secular historian Edward McNall Burns, Western Civilizations, 1963, p. 100 asserted the lofty reputation of the Hebrew Scriptures, noting that ". . . Hebrew conceptions of morality and political theory have . . . profoundly influenced modern nations . . ."**
- VI. **Ezra acknowledged God's involvement in supporting his ministry of providing law and order by teaching the Word, and he praised the Lord for the opportunity to minister this way, Ezra 7:6, 27-28.**

***Lesson:* Concerned that the Hebrews might be rebellious due to reports he had received about them from their foes, Persia's king with God's involvement was so positively impressed by the law and order the Hebrew Scriptures taught that he sent Ezra, a scribe skilled in the Scriptures, to Jerusalem with authority to teach the Hebrews their own Scriptures and to enforce its laws and Persian law that the Hebrews might assuredly be lawful and orderly!**

***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 counter the lawlessness we face, may we be lawful and orderly OURSELVES, (a) immersing our minds and hearts in Scripture (b) and applying it to life for blessing.**

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

We apply this sermon's lesson to the issues mentioned in our sermon introduction, (as follows):

(1) We cannot immediately influence our needy nation and world to be lawful and orderly, but since **God** used a pagan Persian king to direct godly Ezra who was skilled in Scripture to teach it to his people to direct them to law and order, and that with God's blessing, we should immerse our hearts and minds in Scripture and heed it to be lawful and orderly! Law and order might as well begin with us here at our own Church!

(2) We now address the issues of concern presented in our sermon introduction with Scripture (as follows):

(a) On the issue of unlawful conduct in political demonstrations, Galatians 5:16 directs that if we rely on the Holy Spirit, we will not fulfill the lusts of our sin natures, but exhibit qualities like peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control that completely align with all human laws (Galatians 5:22-23 ESV), qualities that also keep a believer from participating in lawless actions in life.

(b) On the issue of racism that led to the summer riots, (i) one needs to believe in Christ as his personal Savior from sin to be given eternal life and to be born of God into the Lord's spiritual family. (ii) In that family, there is "neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for" we "are all one in Christ Jesus," Galatians 3:28. When we rely on the Holy Spirit to live for Christ, we function without a racist attitude!

(c) On the proper leadership in government, or in any other institution, an immense issue today, 1 Peter 5:1-3 offers guidance that directly applies to church elders, but it also applies in principle to leaders in government, business, nonprofit organizations, marriage and family (as follows): (i) leaders must "shepherd" (*poimaino*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 690) those over whom they are placed (1 Peter 5:1-2a), and John 10:11-13 reveals this involves self-sacrificial commitment and effort on the part of the leader ("shepherd") for the welfare of the leader's subordinates ("sheep"). (ii) Leaders must not serve by compulsion, but willingly function in their oversight roles, 1 Peter 5:2b. (iii) Leaders must not use their positions to acquire dishonest gain, but be content with their income and remain fully upright in their financial dealings. (iv) Leaders must not dominate their subjects, but lead by the power of an overwhelmingly good example, 1 Peter 5:3. (v) God rewards such leadership, 1 Peter 5:4.

(d) On the issue the recent moves by Big Tech firms to censor the speech of various conservatives, our Church Board has noted that our web master and several deacons are backing up all of our written and audio messages that we post online. Also, I have printed copies of those lessons on file. So, regardless what occurs relative to our Church web site and the Internet, we will continue to heed 2 Timothy 4:1-2 ESV and keep preaching God's Word, reproving, rebuking and exhorting with all patience and careful instruction! Our ministry's outreach is God's concern, not ours!

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Sacrifice for sin that we might receive eternal life. May we then immerse our minds and hearts in Scripture and heed it to be orderly and law abiding with God's blessing.