

Vital Steps to Restoring the Church that can Restore a Nation

*Thomas W. Jacobson, Executive Director, Global Life Campaign
26 May 2018*

When a nation that formerly feared and worshipped Almighty God, and highly respected human life, forgets God, rejects His Law that prohibits murder by authorizing abortion, and accelerates their spiritual, moral, cultural and legal decline, is it possible for that nation to be restored? Yes! Here are some (I'm sure there are more) of the vital steps of restoration, including the central and essential role of the people of God and the church. They come from the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Daniel, all written in the era that the Jews were given the opportunity to rebuild the temple, Jerusalem, and their society .

1. Intercessory prayer that is faithful, regular, and long term.

- Daniel, who had been taken from Jerusalem and the temple of God into exile in Babylon, prayed “on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God,” with his face “toward Jerusalem,” even when his life was at risk for doing so (Daniel 6:10).

2. Repentance for personal, corporate, and national sins.

- Daniel knew when the 70 years of God's judgment would be completed, and so sought “the Lord God . . . by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes,” praising “God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness,” and confessing the sins and iniquity of his people (Daniel 9:1-19). His prayers and confessions preceded the first open door for the return of the Jews to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel's leadership.
- Nehemiah “was fasting and praying before the God of heaven” after he learned of the terrible condition of the Jews who had returned, and that “the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire.” He praised God for His covenant faithfulness, lovingkindness, and commandments; and then confessed the sins of his people, proclaimed God's righteous judgment, reminded Him of His promise to return His people to their land, and asked His favor with King Artaxerxes. God gave him favor, and Nehemiah was authorized to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall (Nehemiah 1 – 2).

3. Dedicated leaders and people who are willing to restore the church to its God-given design and purposes.

- The first two groups of Jews to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem, under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Ezra, were sent to restore the temple of God as their first priority. The church (temple) must be restored before the walls and city can be restored (society and civil government).
- There must a separation of those who are truly qualified from those who are not. Before returning to Jerusalem from exile, the genealogy of the priests and Levites had to be verified, and those who could not prove qualification were excluded from these leadership and service roles (Ezra 2:1-63). The application today might be to

allow only spiritual leaders who meet Scriptural qualifications, and people who are truly born again and submitted to the Lordship of Christ and the Word of God.

4. The first goal of the leaders and people of God must be to restore true worship.

- When the first large group of Jews (42,360 who were mostly priests and Levites), arrived in Jerusalem, the first priority was to rebuild the altar and restore true worship of God, with sacrifices, singing, “praising and giving thanks” (Ezra 3:1-5, 11). As long as they continued in true worship, the work succeeded. However, when they became discouraged because of their enemies, they stopped building the temple and stopped worship (Ezra 4).

5. Put restoring the church as a top priority – here the role of the prophet is vital, and protection and support from key government leaders may also be vital.

- To persuade the people of God to rebuild the temple of God, even in the face of enemy opposition, God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to exhort, correct, encourage, inspire and teach them – and so they “arose and began to rebuild the house of God” (Ezra 5:1-2; Haggai 1).
- Daniel, a top leader in King Cyrus’ government, must have been the one to inform the king of Jeremiah’s prophesy. He likely also wrote and sent, in the king’s name, the “proclamation throughout all his kingdom” that God had “appointed” him “to build Him a house in Jerusalem,” authorizing “all His people” to return to Jerusalem for this purpose (Ezra 1:1-3; Daniel 6:28). When enemies attempted to stop the rebuilding of the temple during King Darius’ reign, it was likely Daniel who searched the archives and found the “Memorandum” from King Cyrus authorizing the rebuilding, and Daniel probably wrote the letter for King Darius reauthorizing the work on the temple, providing for it, and threatening death to those who opposed (Ezra 5:6 – 6:12).

6. Restore the Lord’s Day (Sabbath for Jews and some denominations) as holy – at least for the people of God.

- The Jews who returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and city restored the observance of the Sabbath Day (Nehemiah 9:14; 10:31; 13:15-22).
- Keeping one community-wide day holy to the Lord and as a day of rest is a principle that God imputed in creation (Genesis 2:2-3), about 2,500 years before He gave His Law to Moses. The Law of God also requires taking a Sabbath Day rest (Exodus 20:8-11), though this was changed to Sunday, the Lord’s Day, for followers of Jesus Christ by the power of His resurrection (John 20:1-26; Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-49).
- It does not appear possible to maintain the reverential fear of God or honor of His Word above all gods, people and writings without keeping the Sabbath or Lord’s Day holy as a community – a reality evident from the history of ancient Israel, and more recently from the United States and many other nations.

7. Clergy set their heart to study, practice, and teach the Scriptures, including the Law of God, the Prophets, Gospel, and teachings of Scripture regarding matters of righteousness and justice that pertain to the church, society and government, and then teach the people of God, including those who would serve in government. By doing so, the church will be restored as “the pillar and support of the truth” (I Timothy 3:15).

- “Ezra had set his heart” to do this, and he and his fellow priests taught the people of God, including “magistrates and judges” he appointed by authority of the king (Ezra 7:10, 25; Nehemiah 8:1-13, 18).
- In any matter of public policy, civil society, or justice, the people need to know the commandments, Law, principles and teachings God has given in both the Old and New Testaments, in order to have an accurate understanding of His will regarding the particular issue. To see the issue as God sees it is to see the true reality, enabling us to live in truth and right relationship with Him and each other. To teach, speak, and live out the Truth of Scripture in society, pertaining to issues affecting society, establishes the church as “the pillar and support of the truth” (I Timothy 3:15).

8. As a priority, address matters of justice and righteousness within your sphere of authority.

- God gave His Law to tell us how to live in right relationship with Him and our fellow man, to give us correct discernment about good and evil, and to provide a fixed standard for justice. After He made possible the return of the Jews to Jerusalem and Judah, they were committing many injustices against each other. So God spoke through the prophet Zechariah, commanding their civil leaders to “Dispense true justice,” and for everyone to “practice kindness and compassion.” Regarding specific offenses, He commanded them to “not oppress the widow or the orphan (the fatherless), the stranger or the poor,” and not to “devise evil in your hearts against one another” (Zechariah 7:8-10). Today, the fatherless and orphan include babies at risk of being aborted, and a woman considering abortion, or medical professionals and others advocating for abortion, or lawmakers making policies authorizing abortion, are each one “devising evil in their hearts against an innocent child in the womb” (paraphrase). Abortion is injustice!
- When the people and leaders know what God says about particular matters of righteousness (living in right relationship to God or people) and justice (addressing violations of the Law of God that caused harm to people), and at least most are committed to walking in His ways, then there can be one righteous standard that is upheld at home, school, work, government, and in the courts. Otherwise, the possibilities of injustice are unlimited.

9. Teach, model and encourage people to know and love the truth, speak the truth in love, place truth as foundation of your society, government and judicial system, that you may have peace.

- Zechariah exhorted God’s people to “speak the truth to one another; judge with truth and (right) judgment for peace in your gates” (courts, civil authority) (Zechariah 8:16). Thus, if you don’t “speak truth to one another” personally,

publicly, and in court, and those serving in civil government and the judiciary do not base their laws, policies or decisions upon truth and right judgments (consistent with the Law and Word of God), then you won't have justice or peace. You cannot have peace without truth. You cannot have peace without justice.

10. Separate yourselves unto God by removing internal opponents and the influence of external enemies.

- Whenever the people of God are doing the will of God that advances His glory and kingdom, there will be opposition, and it may come from both within and outside the group. As soon as the Jews were successful in completing the altar and foundation of the temple, enemies came to put a stop to the work. They came deceitfully as if they wanted to enter into worship of the true God, but “Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the” leaders discerned their motives and refused to let them be a part of building the temple. The true character of these men was revealed afterwards as they and their people “discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their counsel.” Then they wrote King Artaxerxes a letter and succeeded in having him issue a decree to stop the work on the temple (Zechariah 4). Nehemiah faced similar challenges, both from foreigners in the land and from relatives of Jews who married foreign wives. “(T)hey mocked us and despised us,” accused us of “rebellng against the king,” conspired to attack Jerusalem and kill the people, So Nehemiah appealed to God and removed these people from the temple, his council, and the city of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:19-20; 4:1-11; 6:1-14).

All of these steps and more are vital to restoring reverential fear of and obedience to Almighty God, the church as “the pillar and the support of the truth,” liberty and its preservation, and the capacity for righteous leaders and citizens, guided by the Spirit of God, to restore their nation (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; I Timothy 3:15).