

Ezra 4 - The Enemy Wants to Thwart God's Purpose

Opposition Came When The Work Began

Ezr 4:1-3 NIV When the **enemies** of Judah and Benjamin **heard that the exiles were building a temple for the LORD**, the God of Israel, (2) they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, "**Let us help you build** because, **like you**, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here." (3) But Zerubbabel, Joshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, "You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. **We alone will build it for the LORD**, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us."

- The enemy DOES NOT HELP ... He HINDERS - even though he has fine sounding words
- They were NOT like them - **these were the Samaritans** - worshiping God, but serving idols
 - 2Ki 17:41 KJV So these nations **feared the LORD, and served their graven images**, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.
- The enemy likes to infiltrate the ranks and appear to be on the same page, when his intent is to thwart God's purpose (you can see this from the remainder of the chapter)
 - 2Co 11:13-15 ESV *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. (14) And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. (15) So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.*
- Scripture states there are false Christs, false prophets, false apostles, false teachers, false brothers, and false signs and wonders

Opposition is What Happened Between These Verses

Vs 3 We alone will **build** it

vs 24 Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem **came to a standstill**

- Their excitement to build and restore was quickly squelched
- Let's look at the tactics used by the enemy - because these same tactics are used today

FIRST - Discouragement & Fear

Ezra 4:4 Then the peoples around them set out to **discourage** the people of Judah and **make them afraid** to go on building.

- Num 32:9 ESV For when they..... saw the land, they **discouraged the heart** of the people of Israel **from going** into the land that **the LORD had given them**.
 - Discourage = neutralize, to make of none effect
 - Discouragement kept them from going in to receive what the LORD had given them

Sources of discouragement and fear

Unbelief and uncertainty made them immobile - rather than WHOLLY following the LORD

- Jos 14:7-8 ESV I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land, and I brought him word again as it was in my heart. 8 But my brothers who went up with me **made the heart of the people melt**; yet I wholly followed the LORD my God.

An obstacle - is something to run from or run through

- 1Sa 17:32 ESV And David said to Saul, "**Let no man's heart fail because of him.** Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."

SECOND - Bad Counsel

Ezra 4:5 They **bribed officials [esv bribed counselors]** to work against them and **frustrate their plans** during the entire reign of Cyrus king of Persia and down to the reign of Darius king of Persia.

From where do you receive counsel?

- Pro 12:5 ESV The thoughts of the righteous are just; the counsels of the wicked are deceitful.
- Psa 1:1-2 ESV Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; 2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.
 - "God wouldn't expect you to stay married."
 - "You don't have to be submitted to your husband."
 - "You shouldn't spank your children."
 - "If someone did that to me, I'd never forgive them."
 - "You don't need to be in church, it's just a tradition."
- Pro 21:30 ESV No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail **[NIV succeed] against the LORD.**

THIRD - Accusation

(6) **At the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, they lodged an accusation** against the people of Judah and Jerusalem. (7) And in the days of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of his associates **wrote a letter to Artaxerxes.** The letter was written in Aramaic script and in the Aramaic language. (8) Rehum the commanding officer and Shimshai the secretary wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king as follows:

- Pro 18:21 ESV Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.

- Mat 5:11-12 ESV "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Letter - the Nature of Accusation

Ezra 4:9 Rehum the commanding officer and Shimshai the secretary, together with the rest of their associates--the judges, officials and administrators over the people from Persia, Uruk and Babylon, the Elamites of Susa, (10) and the other people whom the great and honorable Ashurbanipal deported and settled in the city of Samaria and elsewhere in Trans-Euphrates. (11) (This is a copy of the letter they sent him.) To King Artaxerxes, From your servants in Trans-Euphrates: (12) The king should know that **the people who came up to us from you have gone to Jerusalem and are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city. They are restoring the walls and repairing the foundations.**

1. Could be truth or error or a mix
2. or current truth and past truth - rebellious and wicked city

Ezra 4:13 Furthermore, the king should know that if this city is built and its walls are restored, **no more taxes, tribute or duty will be paid, and eventually the royal revenues will suffer.**

3. Accusation predicting worse case scenario

Ezra 4:14 Now since **we are under obligation to the palace and it is not proper for us to see the king dishonored**, we are sending this message to inform the king, (15) so that a search may be made in the archives of your predecessors. In these records you will find that this city is a rebellious city, troublesome to kings and provinces, a place with a long history of sedition. That is why this city was destroyed. (16) We inform the king that if this city is built and its walls are restored, you will be left with nothing in Trans-Euphrates.

4. The accuser exalts himself pretending noble intentions - puts himself in the best light

Ezra 4:17 The king sent this reply: To Rehum the commanding officer, Shimshai the secretary and the rest of their associates living in Samaria and elsewhere in Trans-Euphrates: Greetings. **(18) The letter you sent us has been read and translated in my presence. (19) I issued an order and a search was made, and it was found that this city has a long history of revolt against kings and has been a place of rebellion and sedition. (20) Jerusalem has had powerful kings ruling over the whole of Trans-Euphrates, and taxes, tribute and duty were paid to them. (21) Now issue an order to these men to stop work, so that this city will not be rebuilt until I so order. (22) Be careful not to neglect this matter. Why let this threat grow, to the detriment of the royal interests?**

5. Accusation turns the heart of one against another when there was no issue

The Work Came to a StandStill

Ezra 4:23 As soon as the copy of the letter of King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum and Shimshai the secretary and their associates, **they went immediately to the Jews in Jerusalem and compelled them by force to stop. (24) Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill** until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

- This was about 16 - 20 years - What a tragedy - they came so full of life and excitement - but were beaten down to the point they gave up working

How Can We Endure Opposition

ENDURE = to stay under (behind), that is, remain; figuratively to undergo, that is, bear (trials), have fortitude, persevere:

When we work for the LORD - we will find both Opportunities and Opposition

- 1Co 16:8-9 NIV ... because a **great door** for effective work has opened to me, and there are **many who oppose me**.

Jesus prepares us for opposition - he doesn't remove it from us - but he is with us IN it

- Luk 22:31-32 ESV "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

He provides many sources of encouragement

The Lord Himself

- Psa 10:17 NIV You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; **you encourage them**, and you listen to their cry,
- 1Sa 30:6 KJV And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but **David encouraged himself** in the LORD his God.

The Scripture

- Rom 15:4-5 ESV For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5 May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,

Spiritual Gifts

- 1Co 14:3 ESV On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

One Another

- 1Th 5:11 ESV Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

Make Up Your Mind to Finish Well

2Ti 4:7 ESV I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.