

Set Backs Ezra 4

First study Ch.1 we saw the King Proclaiming –

A) Cyrus King of Persia makes a Declaration – Jews could return – rebuild temple – City.

B) Almost 50K respond – led by Zerubbabel – stranger in Babylon.

C) 4-5 month journey – 900 miles through the desert.

Then Last week – Ch.2-3 People Reclaiming

A) 1st Reclaiming their Genealogies – Important to resettle – claim their land.

B) But there was also a Reclaiming of their Theology

1) Started with Rebuilding the Altar

C) Focus on God first – A worship system that centered around a Sacrifice.- Blood shed

1) Prefigured the Cross of Christ

Tonight we come to Chapter 4 – Enemy Defaming

A) Anytime there is a new work of God happening in a Heart – a Church – a Community

B) Also count on ADVERSITY - the enemy – rears his ugly head and wants to stop it.

C) Settle for Mediocrity – Leave you alone – He is smart he knows – not going forward – Backwards

Consider tonight - The Tactics of Enemy to oppose – the building – insight for our lives

1st Disguised Cooperation

A) A tactic of the Devil since the very beginning

B) Satan came to Eve – friendly conversation –

1) Came across like he was on her side

C) Planted the thought in her mind – The real reason God doesn't want you to eat – Holding out on you.

1) He knows that if you eat of it you are going to be just like him

In a Similar fashion the enemy comes in with a Disguise of Cooperation.

V.1 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel, 2 they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here."

Their request dates back about 200 yrs during a time when the Assyrians – invaded the Northern Kingdom

A) You can read about this in 2 Kings 17:24-41 – I will give you the readers digest version

B) Many years earlier, the ten northern tribes were carried into captivity by the Assyrians.

1) Only the poor people were allowed to remain in the land

The Assyrians came and repopulated the land. But they ran into a problem.

A) Mountain lions began to multiply in the land and the Lord had them attack the Assyrians

B) They assumed that their problems stemmed from not knowing the custom of the god of the land.

Bad Karma

C) They sent word back to the Assyrian King to send back some of the priests of the northern kingdom

1) Thinking that they could learn the religion of Israel and thus appease the God of Israel.

That is the way the pagans interacted with their gods.

A) There was no relationship – it was more – good luck charm – Keep the gods happy = good things

B) Want Good Weather? – Offer sacrifices and pay homage to the god over the weather.

1) Want Children? – Appease the god who helped women bare children.

C) So in their minds they needed to learn how to appease the God of Israel.

1) The King of the Assyrians sent priests to teach them

D) Kind of Ironic – Many of these priests had participated in the idolatry that was part of the cause for the Northern Kingdom to be being taken captive.

So these priests come to sort of educate the Assyrians of their God and their sacrifices

A) And the Assyrians begin to start sacrificing to Jehovah but kept worshipping their idols

B) Because – it was Not true worship – just paying Homage

C) At the same time – The Assyrians were Marrying the Jews who were left in the Land –

1) thus Samaritans were Born –

D) Conflict that carried on into NT times – Jews hated Samaritans – half breeds

1) Problems started there in 2 Kings 17

So this is what these people are referring to when they claim we worship the same God!

A) Now the danger of the appeal of these enemies was that their words were not absolute lies

B) They did worship and sacrifice to Jehovah – the Problem was it wasn't true worship.

C) They didn't worship him alone.

D) Now they want to join forces with the People of God in building their temple.

E) They were proposing - A Fusion of two different Philosophies, lifestyles and systems of belief.

It would be Similar if the Mormons or the JW's said, "We want to join forces with you to reach Vista"

A) Problem: Different gospel – Different Jesus. Not God in the flesh!

B) Today we see the **Co-Exist bumper stickers** – a philosophy that is growing in Popularity

1) People like Oprah – doesn't matter what you believe – good for you – Embrace/ love each other

C) Philosophy is growing in Popularity – I don't think that is by accident

When that one known as the Anti-Christ comes into power – Religious side to his deal –

A) His Side Kick is known as the False Prophet

B) He is going to be used by Satan to bring the faiths together – Satan Disguises himself as an Angel of light

C) People are going to Buy in – One world religion that will be a Potpourri of Faiths

D) Problem – two Faiths – Exclusive – Christianity – ONE WAY- RAPTURE

1) ISLAM – Ezekiel 38 – Russia

E) Back to our story – So these half Breed people – Say – Hey we want to help

1) So how did Zerubbabel/leaders - respond to this request to join forces? V.3

3 But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us."

That was the right response/ They stood their ground

A) Realized - A little bit of truth mixed with a little bit of poison - Will eventually Kill you!

B) Compromise – doesn't erase the tension – it only weakens the resolve.

C) The easy thing would have been – to say – sure – the more the merrier

1) Tension wasn't going away – only grow

D) The leaders of Israel knew – greater ramifications in the future if they agreed!

1) So they stood their ground. –

Today they would have been labeled as narrow minded – bigoted

A) Definitely would not be the PC RESPONSE

B) We are seeing a growing tension in our day and age

1) Those who say: Truth – God loves everyone Jesus died for everyone – TRUE

C) **Here is the lie:** Therefore we should be accepting of all lifestyles – all faiths – all people

{God is love

D) Welcoming and accepting mantra - **TOLERANCE**

E) So the Leaders of Israel said – No thank you – can't help us

The Feud Between Jews and Samaritans began right here and would continue to grow.

A) Samaritans refused to worship in Jerusalem – Mt Gerashom was their spot

B) Jews refused to acknowledge them.

C) Jesus later fixes the Problem: John 4 Samaritan woman - **Not where But Who!**

D) So the attack started with an attempt to infiltrate a disguised Cooperation – we are on your side.

E) If we resist the enemy's subtle approach, he will show his true colors by a more aggressive opposition

#2 Discouragement:

4 Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building - V.5 They hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia {Different from the Darius of the book of Daniel

THEY TRIED TO DISCOURAGE

We are not sure how they did this – Could have been that they they said, **“If you rebuild this temple, it's just going to get torn down again.”**

A) It is going to take forever – you are never going to finish! Why Bother

B) Maybe they tried to enforce **ZONING LAWS AND Environmental Impact Reports**

C) Satan often uses the tool of Discouragement & Frustration

You are teaching Sunday School -

A) He whispers to you, **“What you're doing won't make any difference in this world or in eternity.**

B) **Those kids you teach don't appreciate your efforts. Why bother? Just quit and enjoy yourself.”**

C) He Screams **You're just laboring in vain!”**

Trying to build and grow your marriage – trying to be the Spiritual leader

A) Your marriage will never get better – give up!

B) You will never be the leader she is looking for – plus – she really can't be led!

C) Here is one of his favorite lines – **“Look how long this is taking – NEVER GOING TO HAPPEN”**

Satan tries to get us to INTERPRET God's Delays – AS God's DENIALS

A) Here is a **Principle OF Christian growth and life.**

Nothing good happens over night!

B) Like **HAVING** a Baby - 9 months in the womb
1) Fat – uncomfortable

C) Sometimes things in our lives today can feel that way – Delay – Forever – Waiting –

D) **God is working: Growing something IN YOU:**
1) If you let him – God is going to do something **IN YOU/ FOR YOU/ WITH YOU!**

Ever read Christian Biographies – Autobiographies

A) **Hero's of the Faith** – Reading about Hudson Taylor – China Inland Mission

B) People wrongly assume that Hudson Taylor started the China Inland Mission and (presto!) thousands came to Christ.

C) Now He did start the mission and eventually thousands did come to Christ,
1) but not without innumerable problems and setbacks that had to be overcome.

D) He faced many difficulties, illness, the death of his wife, the death of his children, Persecution
1) **Desertion by fellow-workers - financial pressures**

And yet God would use all of that to make Hudson Taylor into a remarkable man – Vessel

A) Taylor would write these words – about his trials and struggles.

My path is far from easy. But I was never more happy in Jesus, and I am very sure He will not fail us; but never from the time of the foundation of the Mission have we been so utterly cast upon God.

It is well, doubtless, that it should be so. Difficulties afford **a platform upon** which He can show Himself.

Without them we could never know how tender, faithful, and almighty our God is.
How much we may and ought to trust Him!

We live in a day and age – where few hang in there!

A) Rarely see it thru the hard times the times of discouragement

B) We mistakenly assume that if the Lord is in it, we won't have hassles, setbacks, and frustrations trying to get it done.

C) What if Jesus quit? – NO Salvation

1) But He didn't – the Joy set before him He endured...

D) What if Paul who said – at times despaired even of life – if he quit – No New Testament

“Never doubt in the dark what God told you in the light.”

The enemy is going to try to discourage you at every turn – hang in there – persevere

A) Remember the people of Israel were getting all worked up – God wasn't coming through

B) Exodus 14 – **Stand still and see the Salvation of the Lord**

B) Translation: Chill out and trust me!

Deut 33:25 As your days, so shall your strength be.

C) God's word to you tonight – Chill out – Trust me

1) Don't interpret my Delay as a Denial – Baby is growing – it is going to be Beautiful

Attacks: 1st Disguised Cooperation

2nd Discouragement

3rd Attack: Accusation:

6 In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

7 In the days of Artaxerxes also, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabel, and the rest of their companions wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the letter was written in Aramaic script, and translated into the Aramaic language.

A) At this point in the narrative (vv. 6–23), Ezra who is telling this story –

1) Cites an example of a letter that was sent at a later time of other instances of the work being attacked.

B) These letters were sent during the time Xerxes (v. 6) who was the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther and reigned from 486 to 465;

1) and Artaxerxes I (vv. 7–23), ruler from 465 to 424.

C) He probably uses this letter for two reasons:

1) #1 Because they didn't have a copy of a letter that was sent during the times of Cyrus or Darius

D) #2 I think the point of lumping all of this together is he wants to overwhelm his readers

1) with a sense of the unceasing opposition that Judah has faced through these years,

E) He is letting us in on an important truth about Spiritual warfare - **opposition is relentless.**

So the example he gives is of a letter that was sent during the time of King Artaxerxes by a man Rehum

A) Eastern rulers depended on their local officials to act as spies and report anything suspicious.

B) Rehum, the officer in charge, conferred with the other officials and decided that the rebuilding of the city was a threat to the peace of the empire.

C) So Rehum dictated a letter to Shimshai the scribe and had it sent to the king.

8 Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes in this fashion:

V.9 From Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions.....¹⁰ and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnapper

{ Aysarian King 668 BC } took captive and settled in the cities of Samaria and the remainder beyond the River—and so forth.

¹¹ (This *is* a copy of the letter that they sent him)

To King Artaxerxes from **your servants**, the men of the region beyond the River, and so forth:

¹² Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building **the rebellious and evil city**, and are finishing *its* walls and repairing the foundations. {Not yet – but lends some scholars to believe – that the Persians wrecked some of the work the Jews had already completed – time of Nehemiah – walls were in ruins again. - Protection}

¹³ Let it now be known to the king that, if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not **pay tax, tribute**, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished. ¹⁴ Now because we receive support from the palace, it was not proper for us to **see the king's dishonor**; therefore we have sent and informed the king, ¹⁵ that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. And you will find in the book of the records and know that **this city is a rebellious city**, harmful to kings and provinces, and that they have incited sedition within the city in former times, for which cause this city was destroyed.

¹⁶ We inform the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the result will be that you will have no dominion beyond the River.

Rehum gave four reasons for his accusations: showing why the king needed the Jews to stop rebuilding the city of Jerusalem.

A)#1 History showed that Jerusalem was indeed a “rebellious and wicked city”; unfortunately, this was a fact that even the Jews couldn't deny.

B)If Jerusalem were restored, Rehum argued, it would rebel against the king and declare its independence (4:12).

1)As long as Jerusalem was in ruins, it was defenseless against the king's forces.

C)#2, an independent Judah would mean loss of revenue and tribute to the empire (v. 13);

#3 A successful rebellion would also bring dishonor to the king.

A)What king wants to have one of his provinces successfully rebel against him?

B)This might encourage other provinces to follow their example.

C)Finally, #4 if the Jews succeeded in rebuilding and rebelling,

1)They would no doubt conquer the entire territory across the Euphrates (v. 16); and this would really hurt the king and his empire.

¹⁷ The king sent an answer:

To Rehum the commander, *to* Shimshai the scribe, *to* the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and *to* the remainder beyond the River:

Peace, and so forth.

¹⁸ The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before me. ¹⁹ And I gave the command, and a search has been made, and it was found that this city in former times has revolted against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it. ²⁰ There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all *the region* beyond the River; and tax, tribute, and custom were paid to them.

The king's officers searched the archives and found proof that the Jews had indeed been ruled by mighty kings (David, Solomon, Josiah, Hezekiah)

A)But they also were ruled by rebellious kings,

B)During the declining years of Judah, their kings had made and broken treaties with Egypt, Assyria, Babylon

1)and had refused to pay tribute to Assyria and to Babylon.

C) Rehum's accusations were correct.

1) People of Israel's own record indicted them.

Now we see the Result: The king ordered the Jews to stop rebuilding the city.

²¹ Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built **until the command is given by me.**

²² Take heed now that you do not fail to do this. Why should damage increase to the hurt of the kings?

²³ Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease.

This was going to stop until the time when Nehemiah comes back – three returns

A) 1st was with Zerubbabel in 538 BC
2nd 80 yrs later – Ezra 458 BC
3rd 13 yrs later – Nehemiah 445 BC

B) So here in Ch. 4 Ezra is using this letter as an example of the type of accusations that were made

1) And the effects it had on the work.

C) V.24 brings us back into the present – really the continuation of V. 5

4 Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building - V.5 They hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia

²⁴ Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

A) So this tells us – the work – stopped for 15 yrs.

B) 15 year gap between Ch. 4 and 5 – worked ceased.

C) Not because they had to stop – but because they caved into the opposition.

1) What happened was the people – neglected the building of the temple – THEIR OWN HOUSES

D) 15 yrs are going to go by – Ch. 5 God raises up two prophets- CH. 5

Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them.

Haggai's message – was a simple indictment – how can you neglect the house of the Lord – building your own homes – Priorities are out of whack -

It worked Ch. 5 v2

² So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them.

So what does this history lesson teach us?

A) Reminds us that the attacks of the enemy are relentless – on going.

B) If Satan can't get us to drop our guard by coming as a Angel of light pretending to be our friend.

1) He will seek to Discourage us – not making progress – we are never going to make it.

C) His Goal is to get us to give up Building – give up Growing – go back to old way of life

D) Or settle for 2nd best – Mediocre Christian experience

E) Or Blame God for our Set back

Reading about the Accusations that came against them

Reminded why Satan is called the accuser of the Brethren

A) And sometimes like with the people of Israel his accusations are true.

B) He can point to situations in our lives – Sinned
1) Point out things no one else knows

C) He accuses to ourselves – CONDEMNATION
1) Condemnation is from Satan – pushes you away

D) Conviction is from the Holy Spirit – pulls you towards

Satan accuses us before God - Look what Rob did today.

A) Did you see how he talked to his wife.

B)Everyday – myriad of accusations –

C)I listen – I am guilty – Hang my head

1 John 2:1-2 **My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate = Defense attorney with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.**

Jesus is our Defense attorney – But the way he argues our case – totally different - from today

A)Today lawyers would try to build their whole case around what a great person you are.

B)You could never do these things that you are being accused of

1)All they have to do is prove reasonable doubt

C)In order to be convicted you have to prove Guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

That is not the way that Jesus our defense attorney wins our case!

A)**Completely the opposite:** Picture the courtroom

B)Satan presents his best case against you – long list of infractions - he is finally done.

C)Jesus gets up – this is going to be good – this is Jesus.

Jesus says: Everything that the prosecuting attorney has said about my client is true.

A)In fact – I could add to the list of sins and failures

B)Now we are sitting there next to the 2nd chair the Holy Spirit – where is He going – what is He doing

1)I don't think this is helping me at all.

C)The Holy Spirit says – just relax – he has got this under control

Jesus continues: My Client Rob Salvato is guilty of all the charges against him and more.

A)You should throw the book at him – death penalty

B)Then at that moment – Jesus says to the judge but I remind you judge that – I already paid the price

1)I was already killed in his place.

C)**This is what John means when he says that Jesus Christ the righteous. ² And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins,**

D) **Propitiation** = the Satisfaction for our sins!

Jesus says: The price has already been paid – therefore it can't be paid again.

A)The judge declares us free to go – no record

B)Righteous because of what Jesus did for us

C)Awesome picture of this in the book of Zechariah.

Zechariah was a priest living at this particular time that God raises up to be a prophet –

A)Zechariah has a vision of an event in the life of Joshua the priest – who was helping Zerubbabel.

B)Turn to Zechariah 3

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. ² And the LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! *Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?*”

³ Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel.

⁴ Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, “Take away the filthy garments from him.” And to him He said, “See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes.”

⁵ And I said, “Let them put a clean turban on his head.”

So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by

That is what the Lord does to us!

A)He paid the price – he took our sin upon himself

He transfers His righteousness to us.

B)GOD also used the Prophet Zechariah to bring a message to the Zerubbabel during this time

God's Promise to Zerubbabel during this time – Prophet Zechariah 4:6

“This *is* the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel:

‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’
Says the LORD of hosts.

7 ‘Who *are* you, O great mountain?
Before Zerubbabel *you shall become* a plain!
And he shall bring forth the capstone
With shouts of “Grace, grace to it!” ’ ”

8 Moreover the word of the LORD came to me,
saying:

9 “The hands of Zerubbabel
Have laid the foundation of this temple;
His hands shall also finish *it*.
Then you will know

That the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you.
10 For who has despised the day of small things?

So here in this story, what we learn about these attacks is that the enemy is relentless

A)God's promise to us is similar -

Philippians 1:6

6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;

One last thing I want to point out before we go our way

A)Enemy coming against Israel by way of accusation is not new.

B)We see it today: Last year UN Resolutions – Only one nation in the UN – supported Israel – that was US.

C)That shouldn't surprise us – God's people – God's promise

But in the last days: Zechariah 12

The burden of the word of the LORD against Israel. Thus says the LORD, who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him: ²“**Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples**, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem.

NLT I will make Jerusalem like an intoxicating drink that makes the nearby nations stagger when they send their armies to besiege Jerusalem and Judah

³ And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem **a very heavy stone for all peoples**; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it.

GOD IS GOING TO INTERVENE

⁴ In that day,” says the LORD, “I will strike every horse with confusion, and its rider with madness; I will open My eyes on the house of Judah, and will strike every horse of the peoples with blindness.