

BOOK OF EZRA
THE NATURE OF OPPOSITION
EZRA 4:1-5, 12-16, 24

Introduction

Opposition and discouragement are not new to God's people! We've all had those times where we've gone from the mountaintop to the valley.

(e.g. The Prophet Elijah—From a great victory on Mt. Carmel over the Prophets of Baal to running from Jezebel for his life and winding up under a juniper tree asking God to take his life.)

When the nation of Israel was defeated, and taken into captivity by King Nebuchadnezzar. They were dragged off to Babylon, where the LORD told them they would have to live, dwell, raise their families for 70 years.

Well, the 70 years had almost passed when the prophet Daniel initiated a period of prayer and fasting in his own life on behalf of himself and Israel. (i.e. He had an attitude of LORD let the revival begin in ME!) The Lord then began to work and move on their behalf. And no doubt it seemed that their season of hardship was over.

In fact, we can read in 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 that the Lord stirred up the spirit the King of Persia, King Cyrus, a heathen Gentile, and directly appointed him to initiate the building of the temple in Jerusalem!

So Cyrus took a national offering, restored the temple treasures that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Holy City, and issued a decree authorizing the people of God to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple.

That was incredible enough to make you stand back and go, "*Wow, what a mighty God we serve!*"

What an incredible thing the LORD orchestrated! After 70 years of captivity, they could return home and head back to Jerusalem to restore the House of God, and do it all with the blessing of the king! Yet, only a comparatively small remnant had the gumption to get off of their seats of complacency and do what the LORD had set into motion for them!

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But the remnant that returned, no doubt, were initially stoked about this! And they needed all the inspiration, motivation, and energy the LORD could give them in order to make the 1000 mile or so journey and take on this monumental task that was before them!

So they returned to Jerusalem, took up an offering where the Temple used to stand, then got settled in, and when they came back together to start building the temple, they began by rebuilding the altar and starting their worship again through the sacrificial system God had given Moses!

Then we saw last week how the next step was the important work of laying the foundation for the Temple! After doing that they had one wild combined song service and thanksgiving and praise service with a lot of shouting and crying!

So everything is going well so far and then we come to Ezra chapter 4 where we see some opposition to God's people and the work they're doing!

Understand that, as believers, we can expect opposition when we are doing God's work! Unbelievers and the evil spiritual forces behind them are always working against God and His people!

Sometimes we forget Paul's admonition to Timothy: *2 Timothy 3:12—"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."*

I. OPPOSITION CAN COME IN THE FORM OF COMPROMISING ALLIANCES! (Ezra 4:1-3)

I think we can see here that Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the other leaders were not fooled! They could smell a rat, and wanted no part of it!

Their reasoning:

If God had appointed them to build this temple (and He did!)
If God was able to stir the spirit of the King of Persia (and He did!)
If God was able to use His power and His might to orchestrate this great rebuilding effort (and He did!)

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Then who needed the help of some conniving, idol worshipping, pseudo-God followers who were nothing more than adversaries!

Who were these adversaries? They were the people who had been relocated in the Northern Kingdom when Assyria conquered Israel. (Cf. 2 Kings 17)

These adversaries wanted to infiltrate, disrupt, and corrupt the project and so they offered to “*help*”! They not only wanted to keep a close eye on what the Jews were doing, but they were also hoping to keep Jerusalem from becoming strong again and they wanted to weaken them through compromise! Because a partnership with these unbelievers would have led God’s people to compromise their faith!

OPPOSITION CAN COME IN THE FORM OF COMPROMISING ALLIANCES...

II. OPPOSITION CAN COME IN THE FORM OF OPPRESSIVE DISCOURAGEMENT FROM THE ENEMY! (Ezra 4:4)

It says here that these adversaries “**weakened the hands of the people of Judah**” and “**troubled them in building!**”

And this was NOT a short-lived thing! This happened for the rest of Cyrus’ reign even until the reign of Darius!

Think with me about “Weakened The Hands.”

The Hebrew word that is translated “*weakened*” here in Ezra is used 46 times in the Hebrew scriptures and means “*to slacken*”. It is translated different ways in our Bible, and they are all pretty much on the negative side. Listen to these renderings of this word: *abate, cease, consume, draw [toward evening], fail, (be) faint, be (wax) feeble, forsake, idle, (be) slack, stay, be still, be slothful, (be) weak (-en).*

So, in essence, the word is associated with discouragement! Or we could say it “*takes the wind out of your sails!*”

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Think about it...how many of us are ready to conquer a big project when we are discouraged? How many of us would stand ready to take on great challenges, scale new heights, launch new adventures, build a temple for the Almighty God when we are discouraged?

How many of us are ready to fight the enemy, battle the spiritual, physical, mental and emotional demons of our life, when we are discouraged? Not many of us, if any of us!

And that is why discouragement is such a powerful tool of the enemy in its ability to paralyze us in our Christian walk towards victory. Subtle, but powerful. And if not discerned and dealt with, it can be crippling!

How does this happen? How does discouragement enter into our lives and our spirit? It is really quite simple. It can enter in through some of our senses. This is how it works: Our senses receive negative information, our attention, our mind, our spirit turns its focus towards those negative pieces of data, and discouragement enters our life.

Let’s Take Our Hearing. Think about this. Think about how different things we hear can discourage us. Through our sense of hearing, negative information enters into our life, our attention and spirit turn towards those negative pieces of data, and then discouragement sets in and can gain a grip on our lives!

Let’s Take Our Sight. Have you ever seen anything with your eyes that discouraged you? Through our sense of vision, negative information enters into our life, our spirit turns its focus towards those negative pieces of data, and discouragement sets in and can gain a grip on our lives!

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So, discouragement is an enemy that is powerful in its ability to paralyze us in our Christian walk towards victory. It is at times subtle and often unforeseen. And if not discerned, it can be crippling!

THE OPPOSITION OF COMPROMISING ALLIANCES...
THE OPPOSITION OF DISCOURAGEMENT...

III. OPPOSITION CAN COME IN THE FORM OF THE ENEMY INSTILLING FEAR! (Vs 4)

So, it says here in **verse 4** that these adversaries *weakened the hands* of the people of Judah and ***troubled them in building...***

The word translated “troubled” means *to palpitate (or trouble inwardly) ; hence (causatively) to terrify!*

In other words it caused **“fear”!**

Oh how our enemy loves to instill fear in our hearts!
Satan is the original “terrorist”!

Psalm 23:4—“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

Psalm 27:1ff

Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.

2 Timothy 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

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IV. OPPOSITION CAN COME IN THE FORM OF ORGANIZED OPPRESSION FROM THE ENEMY! (Vs 5)

“And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose...”

Here we see a **collaboration with others** on the part of these oppressors in an **organized attempt** to stop what the Jews were trying to accomplish—that is, rebuild the Temple!

The word “*counsellors*” there suggests they went to those who had experience at such things as **“frustrating purposes!”**

Another possibility is that they counseled with a **professional criminal element** who knew something about **“frustrating purposes!”**

Proverbs 15:22—“Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.”

Proverbs 20:18—“Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war.”

V. OPPOSITION CAN COME IN THE FORM OF UNJUST ACCUSATIONS FROM THE ENEMY! (Vs 12-16, 24)

We’ll find in the rest of the Chapter that they eventually write a letter to King Ahasuerus in the beginning of his reign and then King Artaxerxes, who ends up issuing a letter demanding that the work on the Temple stop. **And skip down and look at verse 24.**

What was in the letter? Half truths and innuendo—Notice **vs 12-16**

Scholars estimate that this work of restoring the temple stopped for over 15 years and possibly almost 20 years! And it was stopped in part because of **discouragement**, partly out of **fear**, partly out of **organized oppression** and ultimately because of **false accusations**. . . but the start of this downward spiral was **discouragement!**