

Ezra Chapter 4

V: 1 Chapter 3 ends with some mixed emotions: one group weeping and wailing for what they see as a shabby comparison to the first Temple. Then also the sound of rejoicing by the younger men, praising God for having laid the foundation of this same Temple, to them a dream come true. Combined they made a loud shout which could be heard from afar.

“¹Now when their adversaries heard...” The enemies of the children of the Lord are always present and paying attention.

1 Peter 5:8 “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

- They came to Zerubbabel who had been appointed governor by Cyrus, king of Persia.
- The enemies of God didn't mind when the children of Israel were building their own homes, it seems that they only noticed and began to work against them when they got serious about their commitment to the Lord and began to do his work.

V: 2 Here we see a common tactic of the enemy, seeking to join in the work of God - so as to destroy it from within. Persecution never hurts the church; but prosperity is almost always fatal.

- Satan is operating freely in and amongst the church today - it is most evident in those churches that are turning away from the Word of God and the fundamental tenants of Christianity, yet still calling themselves Christians.

Matthew 2:7-8 “⁷Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. ⁸And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also.”

- Like Herod, their intent wasn't to worship, it was to destroy.
- “We do sacrifice unto Him...” no they don't.
- After the Assyrians conquered the Northern kingdom, they removed their captives from the North into different parts of their empire. Later when they had issues with the “god of the land”, they brought back some of the captives to teach the locals how to worship the local god. Those they brought back however were the ones involved in worshipping the golden calves etc.

- They were engaged in a false form of Judaism that didn't match up with the worship of the True and living God. This group of people was a mixture of many different peoples and not really Jews to begin with, nor did they worship the same God.
- They later became known as the "Samaritans" who were part Jew, considered 1/2 breeds and continually at odds with the Jews.

V: 3 God gave Zerubbabel and Jeshua not just discernment and conviction not to compromise, He gave them commandment:

Exodus 34:10-17

Deuteronomy 7:2-4 "2And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them nor shew mercy unto them: 3Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. 4For they will turn away thy son from following Me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly."

Ephesians 5:11 "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

- It doesn't hurt to throw the king's name out there, "we're here on the king's authority..."

V: 4-6 Sometimes the enemy comes like a serpent to deceive, sometimes he comes as a lion trying to intimidate. **1 Peter 5:8**

- Now their true colors and intent come out - they weakened the hands of the people of Judah and troubled them - got in their way.
- They hired more people to frustrate the work of God.
- What that means is that the work of God will be more difficult to accomplish, but because it's the work of God, it will be accomplished!

2 Timothy 3:12 "Yea, and all that will live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

- We're also seeing the transitions from the various ruling / conquering kings. Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Cyrus, Darius, Ahasuerus, to Artaxerxes.
- This Ahasuerus is not the same as we'll read about in the book of Esther.

- This Ahasuerus is referred to as Cambyses in secular history, he reigned over Persia from 529-521 BC.
- Same thing with Artaxerxes, not the one we'll read about in Nehemiah.
- Part of that campaign against them comes in the form of false accusations.
- Again there might be human instruments, but we need to focus more on the source:

Ephesians 6:12 "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

- Who is our accuser? Identified - the great dragon, that old serpent, the Devil, Satan, the deceiver:

Revelation 12:10 "... for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night."

V: 7-10 Israel's enemies wrote a letter to the Persian king to tattle on Israel and get them in trouble, that was their intent.

- This Artaxerxes is called Smerdes in secular history. Smerdes, because he was a usurper to the throne who followed the Cambyses, usurping the throne of Persia, reigning for about 10 months, and was succeeded then by Darius who we'll come to in chapter 6.
- Artaxerxes = Smerdes.
- This is a group letter or petition signed by the various leaders of the provinces surrounding Judah to Smerdes who happened to reign at that time.
- Describing the signatories, representing the mixed bag of nationalities that the Assyrian king had previously brought in to re-settle the area of the Northern Kingdom.
- This side of the river, meaning the Euphrates.
- This is all just the introduction of the letter, "dear Smerdes, from all these sniveling, malcontented enemies of God..."

V: 11-16 The accusation: the Israelites are rebellious, if they are allowed to do this they will then refuse to pay their taxes, and tribute.

V: 14 You're paying us to maintain order, so we're letting you know, because we're good servants (unlike these other guys) and we don't want you to be dishonored this way, they need to be stopped.

- There is nothing in scripture that indicates that they were re-building the wall to the city, that would come later, but their current mission is to re-build the Temple. This could have been happening, or it could just have been a ploy on their part.

V: 15 Part of what they were saying was true; the Babylonians conquered Israel 3 different times, the first two times they just took treasure and people, the 3rd time they destroyed it completely.

- If you don't do something we certify / guarantee that you will lose control of everything this side of the Euphrates.

V: 17-22 The king's response acknowledging receipt of their letter. Yes they've been both powerful and rebellious in the past. Tell them to stop until we can figure out what's going on, until we get back to you.

V: 23-24 As the letter was received by the enemies of Israel they were instructed to stop the construction project by force if necessary - which it was until the reign of Darius. They were then delayed 10 years.

- Typical government bureaucracy; they don't know what they're doing, or what they've decreed in the past and they've got to go look it up and figure it out.
- So the work was stopped for a season, they got red tagged by the building inspectors. Smerdes didn't last long and was replaced by Darius and things will get moving again.

Ezra Chapter 5

V: 1-2 Then the prophets Haggai and Zechariah - we should all read through these prophets as part of your homework (Haggai: 2 chapters / 3 pages) - they will help us to understand everything we reading and studying here in Ezra.

Haggai 1:1 tells us that he came to Jerusalem on August 29, 520 BC.

Haggai 1:4 "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" (Rebuke / shaming them...)

- The prophet Zechariah also came at the same time, he was a great encourage to the people:

Zechariah 1:1 tells us that he came to Jerusalem about 2 months after Haggai.

Zechariah 4:6-9 “⁶Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, this is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. ⁷Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. ⁸Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, ⁹The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you.”

Zechariah 3:1-4 A specific encouragement to Jeshua

Isaiah 64:6

- Response: They started the building process again at the Word of God, given by the prophets. (Rebuke)

Haggai 1:12 “Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord.”

Haggai 1:13 “Then spake Haggai the Lord’s messenger in the Lord’s message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord.”

- God’s Word strengthened and encouraged the Israelites to do the work of God!

Ezra 6:14 “And the elders of the Jews through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.”

[Describing the gift of prophecy:](#)

1 Corinthians 14:3 “But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.”

- Any work of God that isn’t built on the Word of God will not prosper.
- Moses’ success as the leader of Israel came from his faith in, and his obedience to the Word of God.

Deuteronomy 4:1-10 “¹Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you.”

- Joshua's success in conquering the enemies in the promised land was based on his devotion to the Word of God.

Joshua 1:8 "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."

- When we obey God's Word we can expect "great reward."

Psalms 19:7-11 "7The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. 8The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. 10More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. 11Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward."

- If we want to know the power of God, we must also know the Word of God.

Matthew 22:29 "... you do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God."

- In a very practical sense these prophets didn't just show up and tell others what they ought to do, they jumped in and started helping out, working just like everyone else - leadership by example.

V: 3-5 "Who said you could continue building?" The Temple, and the wall of the Temple (not the city).

- Tat-nai the governor and She-thar-boznai; are officials of the Persian government, they are not the same as those we read about in chapter 4 - the adversaries who are named, and who are different.
- This may seem like an attempt at intimidation: what are the names of the men, implying that they will be dealt with. It could just simply be accountability, civil officials doing their jobs.
- The Jews are polite and gracious, they had nothing to hide, and they trusted God before whom all of this is happening.
- The Jews feared God more than they feared Darius or the local governor, so they kept working.
- So the local governor writes a letter, to Darius, the current king of Persia.

Colossians 4:5-6 “⁵Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. ⁶Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”

- As God’s people we must walk in wisdom with regard to non-believers:
- We need to walk in integrity, as a witness before these same non-believers lest we lose our witness and integrity at the same time.

1 Thessalonians 4:12 “That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without...”

- We must also be submitted to the authorities set over us:

Romans 13:1 “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”

1 Peter 2:12-17 “¹²Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. ¹³Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; ¹⁴Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. ¹⁵For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: ¹⁶As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. ¹⁷Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.”

- Because of their polite and gracious response the tone of the letter to Darius is simple and honest - there is no derision.
- In all reality the Temple probably look a lot like a fortress with it’s large stones and timbered walls.

V: 6-17 This latest report pretty well lays out what they’ve been doing - what they said they would do, what they were commanded to do, which is to build the Temple.

“⁸great stones...” In Chaldean this means literally “rolling stones”. It was a mystery for a long time how the Jews moved the tremendous stones the make up the foundation and footings for the temple mount and Temple itself. Some of the stones that are still there today are 8 feet thick, five feet high, and forty five feet long, weighing somewhere around a hundred tons - yet the quarried them off site and brought them into place - quite the engineering feat.

- The Jews didn’t give their names, just that they were servants of God, doing His work.

- Their claim is that some king by the name of Cyrus ordered all of this. Cyrus commissioned them in 536 BC, now it's 520 BC, 16 years later, been working on the Temple for 15 years.
- There is mention of the vessels of gold and silver that were taken initially to Babylon, then restored to Sheshbazzar / Zerubbabel.
- The Jews communicate to Darius through the governor in this letter suggesting that a search through the records be made to determine if they are telling the truth or not.
- All in all they are honest; yes we have a sordid past, yes we deserve the judgment we've received, now we're trying to honor God - and we place our trust in him.
- We are submitted to the king and we trust God to work in his heart, and work everything out.

Proverbs 3:5-7 ⁵Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. ⁶In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths. ⁷Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil."