

The Adversaries of the Work of God

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References: **Ezra 4**, Ezra 3:3; Ezra 4:1-8; Ezra 4:11-24; Ezra 5:1-2; Matthew 28:19; Revelation 2:6; Revelation 2:14; Revelation 2:20; Genesis 3:4-5; Haggai 1:1-15; Haggai 2:10; Zechariah 1:1-7; 2 Kings 6:16; John 15:5

Adversaries in the Work of God

Harold Summers: All right. Well, the book of Ezra, chapter four. And we started studying in chapter four just a little last week. Chapter four, verse one begins:

[Ezra 4:1 NKJV]

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,

And so the section that we're going to read is chapter four. And what we're looking at now is on the subject of the adversaries of the work of God—that down through the Bible and down through history, there are many adversaries to the work of God, in particular adversaries to those who would build the temple of God. In the old days, it was building a physical temple. In the days of the Christian church, it's been building a spiritual temple. But the opposition to the building of the temple has been **rigorous**, **continuous**, and in many respects, **effective**.

So our question then is, what is all this going to be about? It's going to be about what adversaries—what the adversaries raise against the work of God. And it will also help us to understand what our response should be to the adversaries who are attempting to hinder us from the work of God.

So we talked a little bit about the initial things. First of all, the initial problem was they caused them to **fear**. And I'm not sure that I can find that verse—chapter 3, verse 3. Chapter 3, verse 3. That's right. Chapter 3, verse 3 says:

[Ezra 3:3 NKJV]

Though fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries, they

set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and evening burnt offerings.

So the adversary wants to defeat us, and he causes the people of God to be in **fear** of the adversaries—whether the adversaries are real or not—just to slow you down because you're afraid.

And then we pointed out in verse 2 of chapter 4 that the adversaries decided that they would be happy to build with them. And so they said, "Listen, we'll build with you and we'll be your partners." And when that happens, there's a **compromise** that comes in. And the **compromise** is such that very often the people of God compromise down to the level of those who are working with them, and the whole thing falls apart.

So those are two of the initial phases of opposition. And we talked about verse 3 of chapter 4 last week, that Zerubbabel and Jeshua basically said, "No, we're not going to be working with you." And then we were almost getting into verse 4 last week, which says:

[Ezra 4:4-5 NKJV]

Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building,
and 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.

The Strategy of the Adversaries

Several thoughts we can get out of those verses. First of all, it seems that they did three things: they tried to weaken the hands of the people, they tried to trouble them in building, and they hired counselors against them.

How do you weaken the hands? When we get to Nehemiah—I think it's Nehemiah where the workers were trying to work and they had to work with a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other. They were unable to work effectively because of the opposition. To weaken the hands is very often the enemy's plan. He will do whatever he can to slow you down. And if he can't make you afraid and you go to work anyway, he'll frustrate what you're doing in such a way that you will do it more slowly. You will do it with a **weak** enthusiasm rather than a strong one.

And then they "troubled them in building." Very often there are more bold objections to the work, and sometimes you'll find your work is destroyed ahead of you. The evil one does a lot of things to slow the work down.

And lastly, the theme is they "hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose." And that's really what's going to come up in the next few chapters. They said, "Listen, we're not going to let you work." And they hired counselors. They even went to the king to get counselors against them. They kept on saying, "This is **illegal**. This is **illegal**."

You remember that they did the same thing in the days of the Lord Jesus. The priests hired people, false witnesses. In the days of Jezebel, you remember that Naboth—sorry, her husband, Jezebel's husband, Ahab, wanted Naboth's vineyard, and he couldn't get it. So Jezebel says, "No problem, I'll get it for you." So she went out and she hired false witnesses. And they spoke against Naboth, and Naboth was killed, and Ahab got his.

The opposition to the work of God is very, very regular, very frequent, and often very strong. And so my recommendation to you is: don't let the enemy slow down the work of God. Keep doing it. Keep working.

It's interesting again that these counselors were hired. Oftentimes you'll see a group of people and they're together and they're saying, "This is wrong, that's wrong, this should be done, that should be done." When you track it down, often it's **money** that's behind it all.

What's going on in the United States today? Well, there's a lot of activity in the United States today designed to bring down the basic structure of the United States to get a socialistic or a communistic government going. How does that happen? One of the things is that there's a man in the United States by the name of George Soros—he's the president of the United States, he's the president of the United States—George Soros. One of the things about him is that he was, a few years ago, among the most wealthy men in the United States. He's got, I don't know what his numbers are now, probably \$20 or \$30 billion. And what does he do with those monies? The answer is he sends them out to people who will cause insurrection, riots, and plan the destruction of the social system in the United States. It's going on with great effectiveness in the United States today, in part because George Soros is feeding all kinds of money to people. He's hiring counselors and he's hiring activists to go and serve him.

So there is nothing terribly new in what's going on. But what happened in the days of Ezra was that, in many respects, these in the opposition were **effective**, and they accomplished a great deal. And in our days, it'll be the same. But we have got to say, we're going to preach the gospel, whether or not it's legal.

In the days of the apostles, the scribes and Pharisees said, "You can't preach anymore in the name of Jesus." And so Peter and the others went out first thing the next morning and preached in the name of Jesus. And John Bunyan, who wrote Pilgrim's Progress, was put in prison because he preached without a license. They let him out of prison, and so he started to preach again. And they threw him back into prison, leaving him in there longer the next time. So instead of just sitting there, he wrote Pilgrim's Progress.

The work of God has often been met with legal opposition. And the counselors often resort to legal means to accomplish their objectives. So that's sort of a basic outline of where we're going in these next chapters. And I've covered a lot of territory quickly. I'm not sure, Eric, if you want to comment on that or whether we should go a little further before you do.

Eric Peterson: So you covered chapter four then?

Harold Summers: I did chapter four, verse four, yeah.

Eric Peterson: Oh.

Harold Summers: Verses four and five. I haven't gone to the end of the chapter yet. We should read to the end of the chapter, but we haven't gone there yet. All I was speaking of was chapter four, verses four and five.

Eric Peterson: Okay. Yeah, here we talk about—in chapter three, verse three, Harold referred to the people of the land. It says that a fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries. There was a general hostility to the people of God. It was a very cold atmosphere that these returnees came back to. They were afraid of all the people in the countries there.

But when you come to chapter four, it seems to be a little more targeted. These were the adversaries. They actually are actively against the building of the temple altogether. So although they come to them and they say, "Let us build with you," their real motive is stated at the very beginning of that first verse: they were adversaries. They were covering their true motives. And that is like the wiles of the devil.

As Harold has pointed out, any work for God is going to find adversaries. Paul, when he was in Corinth, said, "A great work, a great door is open to me, but there are many adversaries." But instead of giving up, he continued on and a great work was done in Corinth. A very large number of people were saved in that work.

So the first tactic of the devil was to join with them, to **compromise**. There is a movement, and there has been in the past many years, actually, of the ecumenical movement. You've heard of that ecumenical movement where some have said, "We should join together with all

the churches; we should join together to evangelize the world. If we all join together, we can evangelize the world." Well, I don't know. I heard that first fifty years ago, didn't you?

Harold Summers: I would think so, yeah.

Eric Peterson: How much has this ecumenical movement evangelized anything? In fifty years, it's done nothing but weaken those that compromised with it. The work of God is carried out by those who have separated themselves from the world.

Harold Summers: Amen.

Eric Peterson: And many of these churches that they wanted to join with were very worldly churches. They never really preached the gospel completely, and they never followed the Scriptures in setting up their assemblies. So that's the very first thing. They had to separate themselves from the world. And it was a beautiful answer that Zerubbabel gives in verse 3:

[Ezra 4:3 NKJV]

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."

And so they separated themselves from the attempts of the evil one to join with them.

However, the opposition didn't end there. Then the people of the land—remember all those that they feared—they did everything in their power to hinder the work of God. They troubled them in building. Now, the supply chain, you know, to buy brass nails or to buy timber, to ship the timber down from Tyre and Sidon—they had to bring it down by sea, and they had to bring those timbers all the way up from Joppa and haul them on ox carts all the way up to Jerusalem. They had to hire people to hew the stone that would be used in the building. Any type of obstruction they could do, they did. They hindered them in the building. They troubled them in the building.

And then they hired counselors. Therefore, people tried to discourage them, saying, "Oh, you know, you can't do this, you can't do that." And they did that continually, until it basically wore the people down. They had in their hands the direct order from Cyrus to rebuild the temple. It was an order; it wasn't an option for them. You know, the same as what happened in the temple. But we today as Christians, we have a commission—it's not an option, is it, to make disciples of all nations?

[Matthew 28:19 NKJV]

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Harold Summers: Amen.

Eric Peterson: And so, with this opposition continually day after day after day, when they want to go and get some brass nails or some iron spikes from the smiths, they're not going to sell them, or they're going to charge them three times as much, or they're going to delay the shipment of it, until finally the frustrations got great. And then lastly, as we will look at it, they actually write a false charge to the then-reigning king after Cyrus has passed away. They write a false accusation.

The Letter to Artaxerxes

Harold Summers: And that's the rest of the chapter, is that proclamation, which I guess we would get into now, with the result that they gave up building the temple.

So just a couple of other thoughts on this now. They hired counselors. You ever heard of that before? The answer is yes. The king of Moab, Balak, hired Balaam. And when he didn't get the results he wanted, he went to Balaam and said, "I'll give you more money. Curse Israel." And so Balak hired Balaam, and they are trying today to hire those to be opposed to the work of God. Don't be surprised if you see it, if you hear it, if you wonder, "Where do these people come from?" Probably they're being paid by some evil people to complete their work of opposing the work of God.

The other thing is, where do these opposing people end up? Very often the opposition, the adversaries, end up right in the congregation of the people of God. Eric was talking about the ecumenical movement, and how we don't get together with people who are outside the church of God, and we don't work together with people who are opposed to the truth of God. Why do we do that? The answer is, if you go to the book of Revelation, you'll find in the first churches especially that there were opponents to the work of God right in the assembly.

In the letter to Ephesus, the Lord says:

[Revelation 2:6 NKJV]

But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Where were the Nicolaitans? Right in the local assembly. And then you go further on, and you'll find that the Lord says, "I've got something against you":

[Revelation 2:20 NKJV]

Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

And then you'll find in the next assembly, I take it, it's Balaam again. Balaam is there:

[Revelation 2:14 NKJV]

But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

He's already in the local assembly; somebody is paying him, and he's talking up in the assembly. Is that unexpected? Well, not really. Judas was one of the twelve disciples. And every time you and I look at it, we say, "How could that possibly be, that Judas was one of the twelve disciples?" I believe the Lord left him there as a warning that that same kind of thing could happen to us.

If there's something wrong in the assembly, what are we supposed to do about it? We're supposed to point it out and see that it's corrected. And frankly, that is a most unpleasant job, but it has got to be done when it's wrong. What would you do if Jezebel were here at 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel and she decided to preach next Sunday morning? Well, you'd all say, "Jezebel, that's wrong." And you'd go to the oversight, and you'd speak to her yourself. You'd say, "Jezebel, you can't do that." And if the oversight didn't take action and the assembly didn't take action, you would say, "What's the matter with you?" and you'd rebuke the assembly for not dealing with it, just as the Lord rebuked the assembly for not dealing with Jezebel. So don't be surprised if there are problems. There are lots of problems.

And I think when they went back to Jerusalem, we read about the fact that they were rejoicing and weeping all at the same time. Everything was wonderful, and everything was bad. Why were they weeping? Well, they were weeping because it wasn't as good as it was in the old days. But they were probably weeping because they could see problems in the present; they were going to trouble them. Maybe some of those old men said, "This temple

isn't going to be built as fast as we would want. Look at the problems we've got all around us."

So those are some of the background problems. Verse 5 says they hired counselors against them. And so, what were those counselors? Verse 6 says:

[Ezra 4:6 NKJV]

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

They actually wrote to the king. It is interesting, just to go back to the end of verse 5. This happened—these counselors were working all the days of Cyrus, king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius, king of Persia. How long did they keep up their opposition? Well, all the time. They didn't stop. They were rebuked, maybe. And what did they do? They kept on fighting. There's a persistence associated with the evil one that we would be wise to learn from. If we were as persistent in the truth as the evil one is in opposing the truth, probably there'd be far more accomplished for the Lord.

So they wrote. Verse 6 says they wrote in the days of Ahasuerus. Verse 7 says:

[Ezra 4:7 NKJV]

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.

And verse 8 says:

[Ezra 4:8 NKJV]

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

So my question is, how many letters were written to the kings? Certainly one was written to Ahasuerus, probably more. And then one was written to Artaxerxes by Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabel, and the rest of them. And then it would appear that there was a third one, or a third

series of letters, I'm not sure. But verse 8 says Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote. So there was a lot of correspondence.

The question is, who was doing the writing, and what was the correspondence? The answer is, the enemies of the people of God were doing the writing. And we read some of their correspondence.

What should Christians be doing in our day? Should we be becoming politically active? Should we be lobbying the government? Interestingly, in this particular case, Zerubbabel, Goliath, Jeshua, and the people were not leading the lobbying of the government. They responded—well, indirectly they responded—to the letters that were written, but they didn't get politically involved. We're going to read that they kept on building the temple on the basis of the exhortation of Haggai and Zechariah. But they didn't say, "Our strength is going to be to get a power block together, and we will fight the evil."

The ecumenical movement has not been effective, though it had the potential of preaching the gospel to be effective, but it didn't do that. It became politically active, at least in part. At the present time, there is a large evangelical movement in the Republican Party in the United States trying to affect economic and political reform, and frankly, they aren't doing a very good job. Our job is not to become politically involved. Our job is to preach the gospel.

They pulled Peter and James and John and the other apostles into prison, put them in overnight, and they simply said to them, "You must not preach anymore in the name of Jesus." And at nine o'clock the next morning, they were in the temple preaching in the name of Jesus. That's what we're to do. Our job is to keep preaching the truth of God, and don't let anybody shut you down. We don't have to go to the king and say, "Excuse me, king, we would like a letter from you saying we can preach."

So those are some of the background comments. Verse 8 says Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this fashion. I'm just not sure who Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe were, but I'm not sure that they were the same people who wrote in verse 7. I am sure they were not the same people who wrote in verse 6. There was a lot of correspondence going. There was political movement on the part of the adversaries, not political movement on the part of the men of God.

So let's read down from verse 8. Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this fashion. Then wrote Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions—the Danites, the Tarpalites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites,

the Elamites, and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnappar took captive and settled in the cities of Samaria and the remainder beyond the River, and so forth.

These men wrote with the backing of a large number of people. Who were the large number of people? They were the enemies that had been brought in by the king of Assyria a generation earlier, and they had been brought in to basically nullify any religious behavior that was going on on the part of the people of God left in Samaria. It's amazing. It's amazing how active the evil one was. The evil one said, "If we allow the Israelites to go back to their land, they may very well establish some sort of a religion again, so we had better fight against that." So they brought in all kinds of aliens, and they ultimately became the Samaritans. They weren't Jewish people at all, and they intermarried with the Jewish people, but they weren't Jewish.

And so this letter was written by some of the seniors, and it was backed up by the masses that did not want the Lord to be the Lord. That's the way it is in our world today. The politicians can bring in bad politics. How do they get away with it? Because the masses in Canada today basically are saying, "We don't need God. We don't believe the Bible." In spite of all the evidence—the archaeological evidence and the scientific evidence that clearly shows the Bible is right and evil ways are clearly wrong—in spite of all that, they are there. And they're there supporting the evil that's coming out of the capital cities by the politicians.

All right, so all that, before we get into the detail of Rehum's letter, we will sort of let Eric comment on that, and then we'll get into verse 11 and read what he wrote. Thank you.

Eric Peterson: Not a lot to comment on. All the people of the land are named, all these different ones, representatives of all these different peoples that were known later as Samaritans and some of the surrounding area. There seemed to be a united front wanting to stop the building of the temple. So we could get into the substance of that letter, I think is what we're going to look at.

Harold Summers: That's next. All right. So probably I'm going to let somebody else read the letter. Verse 11, let's go through verse 16. Someone can read that for me, please. It would help my voice.

Reader:

[Ezra 4:11-16 NKJV]

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. 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.

[Ezra 4:17 NKJV]

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.

The King's Decree and the Halting of the Work

Harold Summers: Very good. All right, so we'll look at the first letter, the letter that came from Rehum and those with him and was sent to the king. It's interesting that their focus was clearly that the Jews were intending to build a city. What did the Jews go back to the city of Jerusalem to do? They went back to build the temple. The accusation was they are building a city. That's not what they were doing; they went back to build the temple.

And so one of the reasons that these arguments went back and forth is that they were talking about different things. The Jews weren't building the city; the Jews were building the temple. And the adversaries weren't really concerned that they were building the city; the adversaries were concerned that they were building the temple. But that doesn't make a very good argument. So the adversaries took the objective of the people and their own objective to keep the temple from being built, and they focused it on the city. And they said, "These people are building a city, and it's wrong, and they shouldn't be doing it." And you know what was in their mind. But really, their problem was these people were building a temple, and they hated the God of heaven. That was the problem.

Why do people get opposed to Christianity today? Well, they don't want to be accountable to Jesus Christ. So what do they say? They say, "We can't have religion. We've got to have separation of church and state, and we don't want religion." Well, we don't mind some

religions, but certainly not this one. And they don't focus on the clear objective. They don't even admit their own clear objective, but they raise their argument against something else. And this is amazing.

I think we read about the city five or six times; we never did read that the major issue was building the temple. Did these people really mind whether the city was going to be built? That wasn't their whole objective. Their objective was to stop them from building the temple. Let's see what it is. Verse 2 of chapter 4 says:

[Ezra 4:2 NKJV]

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."

Is that what they were saying in their letter—"We're seeking their God"? No. What were they opposed to? Seeking their God. They turned the whole thing into a **lie**. But they came up with a pretty convincing argument. And so they said, "Listen, you make a check. This was a rebellious city. These people were bad people, and if you let them go, they won't pay you money."

Was Israel ever guilty of not paying due money to any other kings? No. When the kings came to them, they demanded money from them often, and Israel gave it to them. This wasn't a valid argument. They basically said—see if I can find the words here—the end of verse 15 says, "for which cause this city was destroyed." Why was the city destroyed? Because they didn't pay dues to the foreign kings? No, of course not. Why was the city destroyed? Because they rebelled against their God.

This letter is a very convincing letter, but it's based on **lies**. It's all based on **lies**. But there's another element in it all. Go back to verse 13:

[Ezra 4:13 NKJV]

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.

What's the main argument? "You let them build this city, and you're not going to get the **money**. And you know that what you want most is **money**." Is that the issue here? No. But

they say, "We can convince the king by telling the king that if he doesn't do this, he won't get the money that he wants." And they knew the heart of the king, who really wanted **money**.

What was their position? Interestingly, in verse 14, it says:

[Ezra 4:14 NKJV]

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,

What does that mean? It means that they were all on the dole. They were in the city of Jerusalem, and they were getting money from the government. And so they said to the government, "Thank you very much. You're giving us money now. If you let them build a city, they won't give you money, and we appreciate the money you're giving us. So because you give us money, we're trying to tell you how you can make sure that you get money. We're really, really good citizens," they said. "By the way, thank you for the money that you're giving us." Sound like a phony-baloney letter to you? Yeah, that's what it is.

Did it work? Yeah, we haven't read it yet, but it worked. So that's the world in which we live. I've told you before that one of the elders at 16th used to say this: "You know, things are getting to be so bad, you can't believe half the lies you hear anymore." You can't believe half the lies you hear, and you can't believe the rest!

I must confess, one of the most disappointing days in my life was when my father came to me one day and said, "Harold, you can't believe everything you read in the newspaper." And I turned to him and I said, "What?" He said, "That's right, Harold. You can't believe everything you read in the newspaper." I was only a little boy at the time, and I thought, "That's very disappointing. I used to read the newspaper to learn stuff." And he said, "Harold, you just be careful. Read your Bible. You can believe everything you read in the Bible, but you can't believe everything you read in the newspaper." And you certainly can't believe this letter because it's full of **lies**, twisting, not focused in the right direction, not hitting the right objective, and stating things that were not true.

All right, so that's the letter that was sent. We don't know much about this guy Rehum the commander or Shimshai the scribe, but they were pretty senior men, and they were all part of this conspiracy against those who were building a temple for the glory of the God of heaven. Okay, anything, Eric, on that section before we go on to the response that the king sent?

Eric Peterson: Well, yeah, it was a false charge because the charge there was in verse 12, which is false. It says:

[Ezra 4:12 NKJV]

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.

But notice, in verse 1 of the same chapter, it says:

[Ezra 4:1 NKJV]

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,

They knew that it was an outright **lie**, but they combine it with **truth**. The worst **lie** is the one that has some **truth** in it. Think of Eve being deceived:

[Genesis 3:4-5 NKJV]

⁴ Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

And it's true—they would be like God, knowing good and evil. That's why God had to shut them out of the Tree of Life, out of the Garden.

But here, there's a challenge. In verse 15, he says:

[Ezra 4:15 NKJV]

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.

And then the result was, of course—and I'm going ahead now a little bit into the response—was that a search was made in verse 19:

[Ezra 4:19 NKJV]

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.

It had rebelled in the days of Zedekiah, you recall. Nebuchadnezzar had come down and installed him as king. He served him for eight years, and then he rebelled, refusing to pay taxes. And so that was in the records of the kings, which the Persians would preserve from the Babylonians whom they had conquered. And they found that this was indeed a rebellious city; Zedekiah had rebelled. And so that gave them the proof then that was needed to believe the **lie** that they were building the city when they were only building the temple.

And so, the worst kind of **lie** is one that incorporates some type of **truth**. And all heresies and many of the apostasies in churches or religious movements incorporate a little bit of **truth**.

Harold Summers: Amen.

Eric Peterson: But in it is the poison of the **lie**, the devil's **lie**.

Thank you. Here I think we see the subtlety of Satan's attack. His name is Satan—he's the accuser of the brethren. He's the accuser; he goes before God to accuse. Remember poor old Job—he moved God against Job just to prove that the devil was wrong. The devil is the one who goes before God to accuse us of sin, and he's very **effective** at that.

He makes accusations concerning us, sometimes to ourselves. Especially when a Christian is in a weakened condition, the devil can come and start accusing you of different things, and really can discourage and bring a person into despondency and despair. They feel they're cast down. The devil is there, and part of what he says is true—we are nothing, we are sinners—and he'll use that against us.

And so we see here now that he was able to stop the work of God by an outright **lie**. Later on, under Darius, a search is made under a different set of governors in the land. These governors were not so much adversaries as they were fairly decent administrators, and they wrote to Darius. We'll find out later on that Darius then responded, searched the records,

and found Cyrus's command decree hidden away in one of the summer palaces of the Persians, way in the north in the mountains. So anyway, that's going ahead a little bit.

But these ones, this already discouraged them. They were a very privileged group, but it was like an uphill battle. Everything they tried, their adversaries blocked. They discouraged them through these wicked counselors, through people denying them the necessary articles that they needed to build. Who knows what other way. It says they "weakened their hands," which means they discouraged them in every way possible.

Harold Summers: Amen.

Eric Peterson: And now they write this letter of accusation, which is the final stroke there. Why they didn't say, "We have an edict from Cyrus," we'll find out. They had gotten to such a weakened state that they began to excuse themselves.

Harold Summers: Yes.

Eric Peterson: And we'll see that at the end of this chapter.

Harold Summers: All right, let's pick up the response then of the king. Verse 17:

[Ezra 4:17-19 NKJV]

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.

And Eric mentioned that in the times of Zedekiah that was true. I guess I would suggest that if search were made of any other city, sooner or later the same thing would have been found true. I don't think that Jerusalem or the kingdom of Judah was in any way worse than all the other nations around. They paid when their bills were due; they paid them.

Anyway, verse 20:

[Ezra 4:20 NKJV]

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.

That's true.

[Ezra 4:21-22 NKJV]

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?

Why did he respond? Because it was in his best interest to keep possibly rebellious cities down. What did he want? He wanted to make sure that he got his share. He's the boss. "That's all I want. I don't care about my people. All that's important to me is that there be no damage to me."

Verse 23:

[Ezra 4:23 NKJV]

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.

As soon as they got the letter, what did they do? They got on their horses and they rode as fast as they could and got up to Jerusalem. They went to the Jews and made them cease by force and power.

Was this a neutral situation? No. Were they delighted that the king sided with them in part? Answer: yes. Were they delighted that they could enforce themselves now? And basically, Rehum and Shimshai said, "We're the boss now, and you must stop. And by force and by all our power, you are going to stop." Typical of the response against the work of God all down through Scripture, and tragically, in our day as well.

Then ceased the work of the house—what?—then ceased the work of the house of God:

[Ezra 4:24 NKJV]

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.

Why did the work of the house of God, which is in Jerusalem, cease? They hadn't been told to stop work on the house of God; all they'd been told was to stop building the city. So why didn't they keep on building the house of God? Because they were intimidated by these letters—the men of God, who should have been strong.

I think, frankly, the men of God, when they read the letter, should have said, "Yippee! We haven't been told to stop building the house of God. We'll build the house of God, and all we've been told is to stop building the city." But they were intimidated by the legal authorities and by the letter from the king, and so they stopped building the house of God at Jerusalem. So it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia. Is that a long time? Then you go to Eric's notes, and he'll tell you how long it was, but it was a long time. They stopped.

Are there things that we should be doing at 16th that we don't do? And the answer is yes, there are a lot of things we should be doing that we don't do. Why? Because we've been intimidated too. In what way? What are the specifics? I'm not sure what they are. I just don't go to bed at night saying, "Thank you, Lord, we're doing everything you want us to do." I say, "Lord, you've got to help us. We should be doing far more. We should be standing far taller. We should be declaring the truth of God far more boldly."

Why don't we do it? Have we been intimidated by the people around us? Have we been intimidated by the fact that they're not flocking to hear us? Have we been intimidated? I guess that is the question. I believe the answer is yes.

So, anyway, that's the way this chapter ends. They weren't told to stop building the house of God, but they did stop building the house of God. They had lots of opposition. Every time they turned around, the opposition was there. But they could have carried on by the grace of God.

In the initial chapters of Acts, we read that the men of God kept on preaching. John the Baptist kept on preaching. Jesus kept on preaching. The apostles kept on preaching. Keep on preaching, brother. Keep on preaching, sister. Tell your friends, tell your neighbors—keep on, keep on, keep on.

I'm reminded of the story that Jay Nicholson told of a dear woman, I think in the city of Aberdeen, who was probably part of Jay Nicholson's family in the past. She had been preaching to a particular man in the town. She was walking down the street one day, and he was walking down. He looked ahead and he saw her, and so he decided to go to the other side of the street. And he walked along, and she walked along. When she got to where he was and he was where she was, she just raised her voice in a loud voice and said, "Mr. So-

and-so, you can't shut me up just by going to the other side of the street! You need the truth of God." And she preached to him on the other side of the street, and everybody heard it.

Okay, praise the Lord. We need a few more people like that around. All right, so that's the end of chapter four. The good news comes in chapter five.

The Prophets' Message and the Resumption of the Temple

Eric Peterson: Thank you. Yeah, well, I've made my comments on that.

Harold Summers: Okay, well, let's go to chapter five:

[Ezra 5:1-2 NKJV]

¹ 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. 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.

Praise the Lord for the prophets. And Eric has been telling us a lot about these prophets and probably would like to tell us what happened. But the fact is that Haggai had some pretty strong arguments. He simply said, "You say that it's not time to build the temple, but you're living in your nice houses. You've been back in the land long enough to get some nice houses now. Why aren't you building the temple?" And his argument was very, very strong. And Eric may suggest we read Haggai, but his arguments are wonderful.

Now the question is, what happened? Zechariah and Haggai preached against the reluctance to build the temple. Zerubbabel and Jeshua said, "We are going to build." And they went and they led the people. I don't know that Zerubbabel was a really good carpenter, but he got his hammer and saw, and he went down and started building the temple. And Jeshua was a priest, and he got his hammer, saw, and chisel, and he went down and started building the temple. And who else worked with them? The prophets. I think probably Haggai and Zechariah said, "We'll be there on Monday morning too." And I think a lot of the other prophets went down.

Who started the building? The leaders. Who did the hard work? The leaders. Who followed them? By the grace of God, the workers followed. Somebody had to lead. Is it easy to be a leader? Not really. The leaders sometimes—are they sometimes the first to be picked off?

Yeah. Somebody's got to be bold enough to lead. Somebody's got to say, "Follow me, charge!" David was that kind of a man. We've got to be that kind. We've got to say, "It's a big deal. Somebody's got to do it; we are going to do it." So don't stop. Keep doing. Get busy. Lead.

And I marvel. I think it's marvelous. The prophets turned this whole thing around. They didn't just do it by preaching; they did it by getting their hands dirty too. So that's the introduction on that, Eric. And you probably want to go from there and tell us more.

Eric Peterson: So, who are these two prophets? That is the first thing.

Haggai, we have no record of him at all—whether he was one of the residents of the land that was left when Nebuchadnezzar had taken away many of the captives and left just the poor of the land. Thank you. We don't know whether he was born in Babylon. We don't have a record of him coming back with any of the returnees with Zerubbabel. So we don't know who this Haggai is.

Zechariah, we know more about him. He's called Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo. Iddo actually had come back. His grandfather, Zechariah's grandfather, had come back with Zerubbabel earlier. So it's possible that he was born in Babylon and came as a very young man. Zechariah's prophecies continue on. Haggai's prophecy is only just a few months, whereas Zechariah's prophecies continue for many years. So we take it that Haggai was probably an older man, and Zechariah a very young man, who maybe had come back, but his name was not listed with those that had come back.

So having said that, if you turn to the book of Haggai, we probably—as Harold has suggested—there was a reason for the prophets to prophesy at that particular time. Now notice here, if you turn to the book of Haggai, chapter 1, verse 1, he says:

[Haggai 1:1-2 NKJV]

¹ In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, ² "Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: "This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built."

Now they weren't denying that the Lord's house should be built. But what they were saying was, "It doesn't seem to be the right time. The difficulties are too great. It seems we must wait for some time." So what they did, they used that as an excuse to further their own interests.

Because the word of the Lord then comes to Haggai in verse 3:

[Haggai 1:3-4 NKJV]

³ Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, ⁴ "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?"

He uses the term "paneled" or "ceiled." What they were doing was they were decorating their houses. Their own self-interest took number-one priority over the Lord's house.

Now, there is a big application that can be made to that, can't we? Do our own interests supersede the interests of the house of God? Today, we're involved in the work of the building of the house of God. Paul tells the Corinthians, "I was a wise master builder, and you are building on the foundation of the prophets and the apostles." We do. Everything we do, we're building the church of the living God, the temple of the Spirit of God. And that is the work that we do—to build up the house of God in whatever way, using the various gifts that are given to us and the various resources that are given to us.

But because of the difficulties and the problems that they were facing, with constant pressure, they gave up. But they used this as an excuse; they filled their time with their own interests rather than the Lord's. And so the prophet then is very direct in verse 5:

[Haggai 1:5-6 NKJV]

⁵ Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! ⁶ "You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes."

They were not happy. They were not satisfied. Later on, they talk about how there was a famine at that particular time. The Lord had not blessed them in their waiting. While they were involved with their own things, they were becoming poorer.

So, again, in verse 7, he says:

[Haggai 1:7-11 NKJV]

⁷ Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! ⁸ Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified,"

says the LORD. ⁹ "You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the LORD of hosts. "Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. ¹⁰ Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. ¹¹ For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands."

"The reason why you're suffering such impoverishment, even though you've been working so hard for yourself, is because it's been for nothing. You've lost it all."

So that is in the sixth month he prophesies. And then that stirred up Zerubbabel and Joshua in verse 12:

[Haggai 1:12-15 NKJV]

¹² Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, 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 feared the presence of the LORD. ¹³ Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, spoke the LORD's message to the people, saying, "I am with you, says the LORD."

¹⁴ So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, ¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius.

So, in three weeks, the preaching of the Word had stirred the whole company of the Lord's people again to start up the work. And then he encourages them in the next chapter, in the seventh month. So it's a month later. He gives another message. There are four messages that Haggai delivers in this book, and they are messages to encourage them now. The Lord says, "I am with you." Whereas before, when they were operating in self, looking only at their own interests, the Lord was not with them. There was a drought; they planted and nothing grew. They were going backwards.

But as soon as they began to work with the Lord, they went up to the mountain. That in itself is a difficult thing. Logging in the mountains is one of the hardest jobs there is on the face of

this earth. I can speak from experience about that! But they went and they did it, and they prospered.

Now, in the eighth month, we have this young man Zechariah. If you just turn over the page, you get to the book of Zechariah in chapter one. We read there, two months after Haggai had first begun to prophesy and a month after he had spoken again and encouraged them, then Zechariah, the young man, opens his mouth, and it says in the eighth month of the second year of Darius:

[Zechariah 1:1 NKJV]

In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying,

The prophet saying:

[Zechariah 1:2-3 NKJV]

² "The LORD has been very angry with your fathers. ³ Therefore say to them, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Return to Me," says the LORD of hosts, "and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts.

Whereas Haggai talks mostly about their outward actions, Zechariah focuses more on their inner thoughts, their inner condition. He says, "Consider your ways." They were looking at their own self-interest. What they needed to do was **repent**. "Turn back to me," says the Lord, "and I will return to you."

[Zechariah 1:4 NKJV]

⁴ "Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets preached, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Turn now from your evil ways and your evil deeds." But they did not hear nor heed Me," says the LORD.

[Zechariah 1:5 NKJV]

⁵ "Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever?

There's a powerful preacher, this young man. "Your fathers—consider, where were they?" They were taken into captivity; they were slain in the streets of Jerusalem at the fall of their great city. He said:

[Zechariah 1:6 NKJV]

⁶ Yet surely My words and My statutes, Which I commanded My servants the prophets, Did they not overtake your fathers? "So they returned and said: "Just as the LORD of hosts determined to do to us, According to our ways and according to our deeds, So He has dealt with us."

God told them through the prophets what would happen if they did not turn, and it happened exactly as God had said. He had taken them into captivity, and they had just come back a few short years before that. And now they had turned away again. He says, "Return to me."

How quickly we backslide. How quickly! In a matter of hours, sometimes, we can be out of fellowship with the Lord. It can be almost impossible to think of, but we can. We are so dependent upon the Lord every moment. We have to live moment by moment; we are kept by Him.

So then Haggai prophesies in the ninth month, in chapter 2 of Haggai, verse 10, and he promises blessing there. And then in the eleventh month, Zechariah, in the second year of Darius. So therefore, we have four messages recorded in the second year of Darius when they came back in six months. There are these powerful messages from these two prophets.

This one is the vision of the horses, which—I don't know if we need to bother reading it because our time is gone, but maybe we'll look at it next week because I think it's important that these visions and messages of the prophets were vital to restoring the people to their condition before the Lord, where they could build His temple and glorify the Lord in doing so.

Harold Summers: Amen. Sounds like a good idea. So we'll try to turn to that next week. Again, thank you. Our time is gone. We'll ask someone just to close in prayer, and by the grace of God, we'll carry on this week and see you again on Sunday. Thank you.

Closing Prayer

Speaker: Father, we're so thankful that we have Your Word to study and that we can learn more and more every time we open up Your Word. Thank you tonight for all of the things that

were said and the things that we learned tonight. And Lord, we know that Satan, of course, tries to discourage us in any way that he can. We know that in this world, as far as the earthly realm is concerned, there are many more that follow Satan than follow the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we will have a great opposition until our Savior comes again.

We were taught to pray in the disciples' prayer, and one of the first things is, "Your kingdom come." That's Your kingdom that's going to happen on this earth. But before that, we're actually praying that You will come back soon and take us home. And we want that. And Lord, You have been so kind to us to allow us to be with You in Your kingdom when You reign over all of this earth. The tables will totally be turned, and You are in control anyway, but then You will be ruling with a rod of iron.

And as in the days of Elisha, when all of the king's men came to arrest Elisha, there was great fear upon his servant. And he says, "Lord, open his eyes." He says:

[2 Kings 6:16 NKJV]

So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

So we know that Elisha didn't succumb to the great number against them, and we shouldn't either because we are as if we're already in heaven. We have the Holy Spirit—the greatest, absolute greatest power that works in us from day to day.

Lord, sometimes I'm so discouraged. I say, "Lord, I read in John 15, and it says, 'Without me, you can do nothing.'"

[John 15:5 NKJV]

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

And that's absolutely true. But we have Him. We have You living in us. And sometimes I just say, "Lord, today, I will not be able to do one thing unless You, by Your Holy Spirit, help us." Even as You did with Joshua and Zerubbabel—You, by Your Holy Spirit, encouraged them, or they would have never been able to build that temple.

Harold Summers: Amen.

Speaker: Amen. They were finished. They were finished. And we're finished every day because we have so much opposition, and it's going to get worse and worse. But we're thankful that we can encourage each other as we did tonight. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And Lord, take everyone home safely tonight, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen.

Harold Summers: Amen.