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C1320 – June 19, 2013 – Ezra 4:1-24
The Adversaries

We are studying the Book of Ezra which is a continuation of the book of Chronicles, which was also written by Ezra. Ezra wrote around 445BC while Persia was the dominant kingdom in the world. Daniel had sketched to him the time of the Gentiles as a sequence of four Gentile kingdoms; first, Babylon, second, Persia, third, Greece and fourth, Rome. Ezra lived during the second kingdom, Persia and wrote about two of the returns to the land. The first return is recounted in Ezra 1-6, it was prophesied by Jeremiah and occurred in 538BC when Cyrus issued a decree for the Jews to return and rebuild the temple. This return was led by Zerubbabel who was in the line of David. Along with him the Lord stirred up about 42,000 Jews to give up their easy, prosperous lives and make the grueling trek back to the land to start a new life. These Jews desired to be loyal to God by rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. In all the rebuilding was completed in 515, having taken 23 years to complete. Between Ezra 6 and 7 there's a 58 year gap during which time the events of Esther took place. The second return is recounted in Ezra 7-10, it was authorized by Artaxerxes' decree in 458BC allowing Ezra to return and re-instate proper Temple worship. Ezra had set his heart on studying the Law of the Lord and teaching it to the Jews *in* the land of Israel. When he returned to the land he found that the Jews in the land had started to assimilate with pagan girls in violation of the Law of Moses and that consequently they were facing divine discipline. So his return centers on the reformation of the people and the way he accomplished this reformation was by confronting them with the word of God so they would be convicted of their sin, confess their sin and be restored to fellowship with the Lord. This was necessary to avoid further divine discipline which would eventually result in exile from the land. If this occurred then God's Messianic purposes that necessitate the fulfillment of the Law of Moses in relation to the Temple could not be fulfilled. Therefore God took measures to preserve them during

this time period so that when the fullness of time came the Messiah could fulfill all righteousness. The gospels report that Mary and Joseph took baby Jesus to the Temple at the appointed time, the eighth day, that they had Him circumcised and dedicated and that in His life Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of the Law without faltering even once; dying a substitutionary blood atonement for the sins of the world. Ezra is therefore essential to seeing how God thwarted Satanic attempts to cause Jewish assimilation that would result in divine discipline and thwart the Messiah's advent.

We learned in Ezra 1 that God in order to start these purposes in motion, moved the heart of a pagan king named Cyrus to issue a decree allowing the Jews to return to their land (1:1-4). This work was consistent with what God had earlier promised through the prophet Jeremiah that they would be in exile to Babylon for 70 years (Jer 25:11; 27:19-22; 29:10). And just as God had providentially preserved His elect nation through the 70-year exile He was now continuing to work on their behalf by allowing them to return to the land. He also stirred the hearts of others to financially contribute to help them return (1:5-6). Further He even caused Cyrus to return to the Jews the temple treasures (1:7-11) that had been taken by king Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 1:2). All in all it was clear God was working on their behalf to fulfill His Messianic purposes.

In Ezra 2 the list of the returnees show that God had preserved the kingly line of Messiah through Zerubbabel as well as the priestly line of Zadok through Jeshua. God was clearly interested in completing His covenant promises. In order to reach those promises the people had to rebuild the Temple and re-establish the sacrificial system. Accordingly the people gave tremendous amounts of money for the project.

In Ezra 3, after the Jews were settled in their cities they organized quickly at Jerusalem to rebuild the bronze altar. There were other people in the land that were terrorizing them and they sought God's protection. In order to procure God's protection sacrifices would need to be offered according to the Law of Moses. In preparation the priests underwent the red heifer purification, built the altar on the designated location of the temple mount and began offering the daily sacrifices on the first day of the seventh month. On the fifteenth of the month they celebrated the Feast of Booths with all its required sacrifices for seven days. Afterward they made preparations for

repairing the temple foundations by importing cedars from Lebanon in order to repair the temple foundations. The work proceeded along the exact lines of the 500-square cubit foundation of Solomon's Temple. When completed there was an ambivalent response from the people; the young rejoiced by praising and thanking God, the older wept because the temple was so inferior to Solomon's.

Tonight we come to Ezra 4 and since the altar was in place and the foundations repaired it was time to build the temple proper which is the subject of chapters 4-6. And right off the bat they are met with opposition. **Now when the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the people of the exile were building a temple to the LORD God of Israel, 2They approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' households, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we, like you, seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here.** It sounds like a really nice proposition to help rebuild the temple but the author alerts us in verse 1 that they were **enemies**, and **enemies** in particular of which two tribes? Not all twelve tribes just two tribes, the tribes **of Judah and Benjamin**. These were the two southern tribes that made up what was collectively known as the kingdom of Judah. These were the two tribes that had been taken into exile by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon in 605, 597 and 586BC and had now returned. The other ten tribes had been taken into exile long, long before by Sennacherib king of Assyria in 721B. They're not clearly in the picture here but in a way they actually are. But it's the two tribes that these enemies oppose and so we want to identify the enemies. There are several hints in verse 2. First, they identify themselves as seekers of the God of Israel. Second, they identify themselves as having been sacrificing to the God of Israel for some time. Third, they identify themselves as having been brought to this land by **Esarhaddon king of Assyria**. By these three claims they are making a claim to the land and to rights to rebuild the Temple. It doesn't take long when someone gets in the land of Israel to claim it's their land. It's just the nature of the conflict over that piece of real estate. So who are these people? If you take a look at the handout titled *Chronology of Opposition in Ezra 4* you'll find that Esarhaddon brought them there during the glorious age of Assyria somewhere between 680-669BC when he was king, some 140 years before this event in 535BC. It was the official government policy of Assyria when they conquered a nation to deport the survivors to a foreign

land; somewhere else in their empire so that they would intermarry with the local foreigners which would break down national fervor and prevent uprisings.

And here we have some of these people who are now making a claim in the land and a right to rebuild the Temple because they worship and seek the God of Israel. Now this is all true. Take a look at 2 Kings 17:24 and you'll see how true it is. In 2 Kings 17:23, at the end of the verse you see the Assyrian policy of deporting conquered peoples to foreign lands. This is back in the days of the Assyrian warlord Sennacherib who conquered the ten tribes of Israel in 721BC. And notice the end of verse 23, "So Israel was carried away into exile from their own land to Assyria until this day." That was the ten tribes in 721BC and their exile left a vacuum in the northern kingdom of Israel. Nobody was there except a few Jewish stragglers that got left behind. So what happened to the vacuum? A vacuum's got to be filled and the Assyrian kings filled it with other conquered foreigners. Notice verse 24, "The king of Assyria brought men from Babylon and from Cuthah and from Avva and from Hamath and Sepharvaim, and settled them in the cities of Samaria in place of the sons of Israel. So they possessed Samaria and lived in its cities." That's the game that was being played. They were moving people all over the place. But notice what happened to these people that were moved in. Verse 25, "At the beginning of their living there, they did not fear the Lord; therefore the Lord sent lions among them which killed some of them. ²⁶So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, "The nations whom you have carried away into exile in the cities of Samaria do not know the custom of the god of the land; so he has sent lions among them, and behold, they kill them because they do not know the custom of the god of the land." ²⁷Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, "Take there one of the priests whom you carried away into exile and let him go and live there; and let him teach them the custom of the god of the land." In other words, go get a Jew who knows what he's doing and bring him back. Verse 28, "So one of the priests whom they had carried away into exile from Samaria came and lived at Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the Lord." You'll notice this priest, whoever he was, didn't have a clue about how to worship the Lord properly, you were supposed to worship at Jerusalem, not at Bethel, Bethel was where Jeroboam set up a false worship system. So these people are doing it all wrong anyway. This all got started in the time of Sennacherib and it just continued to happen and eventually there was all this intermarriage between

Gentiles and Jews and what do you get when you cross a Gentile and a Jew? You get a Samaritan. And those are the people in Ezra 4 that are trying to help rebuild the Temple? Samaritans, or at least the forerunners of the Samaritans. So the Samaritans are mixed racially, the mixture of Jewish and Gentile blood.

But they were mixed in another way already alluded to, they were mixed religiously. Notice verse 29, while they did worship the God of Israel, is that all they worshipped? “But every nation still made gods of its own and put them in the houses of the high places which the people of Samaria had made, every nation in their cities in which they lived. ³⁰The men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, the men of Hamath made Ashima, ³¹and the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech the gods of Sepharvaim. ³²They also feared the Lord and appointed from among themselves priests of the high places, who acted for them in the houses of the high places.” Verse 41 is a final summary, “So while these nations feared the Lord, they also served their idols; their children likewise and their grandchildren, as their fathers did, so they do to this day.” In other words, the Samaritans were mixed religiously, they were into religious syncretism, a little bit of YHWH and a little bit of Buddha and a little bit of Confucius, just put it all together into a new blend, everybody likes a blend, it’s the buffet style of religion. Those were the Samaritans. And over time the Samaritans got larger and larger and they got their own version of the Bible called the Samaritan Pentateuch where they replaced Mt Zion with Mt Gerizim and made all the appropriate changes to erect a new religion such that by the time of Christ it was not a very friendly relationship between Samaritans and Jews. John’s gospel says, “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.” The Samaritans were off limits. If you went in there you were considered unclean. Beyond that it was just plain dangerous to pass through. Lots of Jews that tried to pass through were murdered. That’s why it’s so startling when the disciples find Jesus talking to a Samaritan woman at the well. It was already a social taboo to talk to a woman, much more a Samaritan. That was a no-no. Of course, Jesus was showing where the gospel was going but this was a confrontation that had been brewing for centuries. Samaritans at Jews throats, Jews at Samaritan’s throats, it all goes back to this conflict in Ezra 4 and from there it just grew.

This is just the early stages of the conflict in Ezra 4:2. The Samaritans are attempting to infiltrate the Jewish ranks, to assimilate with them. “Hey, let us build with you, they say, we worship the same God.” And now you know that’s true insofar as it goes, but it doesn’t go far enough does it? They also worshipped other gods and that violates what commandment? The very first one, “You shall have no other God’s before me,” Exodus 20:3, it was syncretism and Zerubbabel knew it; Jeshua knew it and they would have nothing to do with it.

Verse 3, But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of fathers’ households of Israel said to them, “You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God; but we ourselves will together build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us.” Now verse 3 is an offense to a modern reader of the Bible, many people do not like this verse. “Why, Zerubbabel and Jeshua are religious bigots. To think they have the way, the truth and the life and can’t learn something from other religious people or at least join hands with them in a construction project.” But we have to learn a lesson right here. God is light and He has nothing to do with darkness. So does God condone us joining hands with other religious groups that don’t worship Him and Him alone? The answer should be obvious. God doesn’t want us to join hands with Mormons. And yet that’s what Glenn Beck has been trying to get going for years and at the rally in Washington, DC a year and a half ago Mormons celebrated the dividing wall between Christianity and Mormon’s coming down. Finally Christians were admitting that Mormons worship the same God. Baloney! Any comparative religion study will show you the two don’t even resemble one another. The god of Mormonism procreated with Eve to produce Jesus and Lucifer who were brothers. Nonsense! To join hands with them would be to capitulate to paganism. What about joining hands with Islam? What is now being called Chrislam which started in Africa in the 1980’s and has spread to America through an initiative encouraging pastors to have Muslim clerics read the Koran and pray from Christian pulpits across our country. That way we can learn religious insights and truths from them and they from us in this one big boiling pot of ecumenical religion. And many pastors, even proclaimed evangelical are jumping in the boiling pot syncretizing Christianity and Islam as if we worship the same God. We most emphatically do not! The God of Islam is impersonal and unknowable. The God of Christianity is personal and knowable. You couldn’t get two more

different gods. The bottom line is syncretism is idolatry and God hates it. God condemns it. What did Paul say in 2 Cor 6:14ff? “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ¹⁷“Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord. “And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. ¹⁸“And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” Says the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor 6:14-18).

Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers’ households of Israel gave the right answer. No, you have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God. These two men are leaders; strong leaders who knew the word, who knew the Samaritans didn’t worship God exclusively and therefore knew they would be leading their people into syncretism if they joined hands. So they stood up to them and said no, sorry. Verse 4 the results, **Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their counsel all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.** The three responses show that their original intentions were evil to begin with as verse 1 attests. First, they **discouraged the people of Judah** from building. Second, they **frightened them from building**. And third, they **hired counselors against them to frustrate their counsel all the days of Cyrus king of Persia**. In other words they bribed officials involved in the building in order to slow the progress of rebuilding. And this went on **even until the reign of Darius king of Persia**. So it went on for about 15 years. Why, on an ultimate level, did they do this? Was it just because they liked to bother people? No. It was because they were satanically motivated. Satan wanted the Jews out of the land so that the Messianic purposes of God could not be fulfilled. The only way to get them out of the land was to intimidate them. So he used these scare tactics. And ultimately they did stop building the temple until the second year of King Darius.ⁱ

Ezra 4:6, and here we jump all the way to **the reign of Ahasuerus** who reigned from 486-464BC. Because the following chronology goes through

these later kings and then returns in verse 24 to Darius, an earlier king, critics argue that this is a confused chronology and therefore there are problems with the book of Ezra. However, it's better to explain that when Ezra was recording the opposition to rebuilding the Temple in vv 1-5 it reminded him of further opposition that came in later years and so he takes a short aside to record these oppositions in vv 6-23 before returning to the original opposition under Cyrus and Darius in v 24. Therefore vv 6-23 are parenthetical remarks of further opposition inserted here to draw the focal point to the central idea of the passage; namely, God's people will face opposition when they follow His word fully but we shouldn't let opposition discourage or frustrate us from continuing to follow Him. Such opposition is satanically designed to de-rail us, stagnate us and thwart the plan of God. Don't be discouraged, remain steadfast and immovable, fully aware that there is a conflict raging and if God is for us, who can stand against us? So vv 6-23 record a series of further opposition that came to mind as Ezra recounted the first opposition.

The verse 6 opposition occurs **in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign**, and at this time the enemies **wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem**. We don't have access to the **accusation** but the noun form of this word can represent Satan and his method of judicial accusing. Somehow or another the letter accused them of violating Persian law. And we may safely suggest that behind the judicial accusation is Satan who is trying to cause problems for them. This occurred **in the beginning** of Ahasuerus' reign which was 486BC and this Ahasuerus we also know as Xerxes. He was the king in the Book of Esther who eventually made Esther his queen after deposing Vashti. But before all of that this legal accusation was written, inspired by Satan, to try and frustrate **the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem**.

Verse 7, more opposition, **And in the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of his colleagues wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the text of the letter was written in Aramaic and translated from Aramaic**. In other words, what follows starting in 4:8 all the way to 6:18 and also in 7:12-26 is in the Semitic dialect called **Aramaic**. We met this before in the Book of Daniel. Daniel and Ezra are the two main books that contribute to the third language in which the Bible is written, usually people think of just two, Hebrew and Greek, but there's a third,

Aramaic, that composes a few small portions near the end of the OT. **Aramaic** was the *lingua franca* of the day or the trade language, the language of commerce and diplomacy, so all the official government correspondence would be written in this language and the verse says **the text of the letter was written in Aramaic and translated from Aramaic** meaning the original **Aramaic** letter was translated from **Aramaic** into the king's native Persian tongue. So starting in verse 8 the original text shifts to **Aramaic**.

Now **Artaxerxes** ruled Persia from 464-424BC so he's much later. And we have good reason to think this letter was written about 446BC just before Nehemiah arrived with the third group of returnees in 444BC because when Nehemiah comes into the king's service as his cupbearer he requests that he be allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city and Artaxerxes grants the request. So the letter we have here that requests the king stop the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, which he did, was reversed in 444BC. But Ezra is transcribing the actual letter in its original Aramaic form so that we have access to the kind of opposition he saw in his own day.

Verse 8, **Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes, as follows—and just look at all the support he's garnered for this letter, verse 9, then wrote Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe and the rest of their colleagues, the judges and the lesser governors, the officials, the secretaries, the men of Erech, the Babylonians, the men of Susa, that is, the Elamites, 10and the rest of the nations which the great and honorable Osnappar deported and settled in the city of Samaria, and in the rest of the region beyond the River.** In other words, everybody in the whole region agrees with the letter, there are no detractors and so you can see the tactic, "If everyone agrees with it it must be right, I mean, not everyone could be wrong." So they've got this big long list of signees starting with the people high in command like the **commander** and the **scribes** which were wise men in those days and the **judges** and on down the list to all the people that were deported by **Osnappar**. Who's **Osnappar**. That's Ashurbanipal, you can see on your chart he's another Assyrian king that reigned from 668-630BC. He also followed the standard government policy of deporting and assimilating conquered peoples which gave rise to the Samaritans living in the land of Israel. So this is the Samaritans causing

problems for the Jews again and you can understand when you get to the gospels why these people had no dealings with one another.

Now **this is the copy, verse 10, of the letter which they sent to him: “To King Artaxerxes: Your servants, the men in the region beyond the River, and now ¹²let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem; they are rebuilding the rebellious and evil city and are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations. ¹³“Now let it be known to the king, that if that city is rebuilt and the walls are finished, they will not pay tribute, custom or toll, and it will damage the revenue of the kings. ¹⁴“Now because we are in the service of the palace, and it is not fitting for us to see the king’s dishonor, therefore we have sent and informed the king, ¹⁵so that a search may be made in the record books of your fathers. And you will discover in the record books and learn that that city is a rebellious city and damaging to kings and provinces, and that they have incited revolt within it in past days; therefore that city was laid waste. ¹⁶“We inform the king that if that city is rebuilt and the walls finished, as a result you will have no possession in *the province beyond the River.*”** That’s the letter and in verse 12 you see that there were **Jews who came up from** king Artaxerxes, that would refer to Ezra in Ezra 7 and those who returned with him in 458BC. The accusation is made that **they are rebuilding the rebellious and evil city and are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations.** Now in Ezra 7 we have record that Artaxerxes gave him gold and silver to go back to the land and make provisions for the Temple so it could get operational again. So the authorization has to do exclusively with the Temple though there is a loose end in the letter that grants permission to spend extra money on whatever Ezra thinks is necessary. But for the most part it’s pretty clear that it had to do with the Temple so rebuilding the city would be outside of the authorization. And the full description here of what they were doing means they were making it a fortified city and building a fortified city meant independence, unless authorized by the king. So there had to be authorization for this kind of building and their permit didn’t quite cover this kind of building.

In verse 13 they begin to make three basic arguments why the king should stop the building. First, if they complete the city **they will not pay tribute,**

custom or toll and it will damage the revenue of the king. In other words they won't pay their taxes because they'll be independent and this will decrease revenue for the king which is undesirable. The government has to keep the money rolling in and so the first argument is it will cause a decrease in revenue. Second, verse 14, one of the consequences of decreased revenue is that it will make the king look bad and we can't have that, we are so concerned about the king, we are such great servants we couldn't let this go overlooked. As they put it, **Now because we are in the service of the palace, and it is not fitting for us to see the king's dishonor, therefore we have sent and informed the king.** The way it reads in the Aramaic it says "we eat the salt of the palace," that is, we are dependent on the state and if the state looks bad it reflects on us and we look bad, so because we are such good servants of the king and his palace we had to notify you of this. In short their kissing up; they're a bunch of brown-nosers. The third argument is verses 15-16, **And you will discover in the record books and learn that that city is a rebellious city and damaging to kings and provinces, and that they have incited revolt within it in past days; therefore that city was laid waste.** ¹⁶**"We inform the king that if that city is rebuilt and the walls finished, as a result you will have no possession in *the province beyond the River.*"** In other words, their revolt will encourage other people to revolt and then the king could lose possession on the other side of **the River** Euphrates. So it's not in the king's best interest to allow this rebuilding to continue. They even encourage the king to check the royal records which would reach back even into the times of Assyria and Babylon and there were cases in the time of Hezekiah who rebelled against Sennacherib as well as others like Zedekiah. So these kinds of records were indeed there and they encouraged the king to search it out.

In verse 17 we have the king's reply, **Then the king sent an answer to Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their colleagues who live in Samaria and in the rest of *the provinces beyond the River:* "Peace. And now ¹⁸the document which you sent to us has been translated and read before me."** Apparently it was read to him in Persian. Verse 19, **"A decree has been issued by me, and a search has been made and it has been discovered that that city has risen up against the kings in past days, that rebellion and revolt have been perpetrated in it, ²⁰that mighty kings have ruled over Jerusalem, governing all *the provinces beyond the River,* and that tribute,**

custom and toll were paid to them.” In other words, we did some research down here and your arguments bear weight, these evidences in the royal records have been found and my interests are possibly in danger. So he issues a temporary decree to stop rebuilding in verse 21, notice it’s only temporary. **“So, now issue a decree to make these men stop work, that this city may not be rebuilt until a decree is issued by me.”** In other words, he wants to check into this some more because he was the one who originally sent Ezra back with a decree and all kinds of money so that they could get the Temple up and operational about eight years before, and he’d given bountifully out of his royal treasury for it, so he knows Ezra and he wants to look into this issue further but for the time being **make these men stop work** because he did not authorize the rebuilding of the city. Verse 22, **“Beware of being negligent in carrying out this matter; why should damage increase to the detriment of the kings?”** ²³**Then as soon as the copy of King Artaxerxes’ document was read before Rehum and Shimshai the scribe and their colleagues, they went in haste to Jerusalem to the Jews and stopped them by force of arms.** And they may have broken down part of the wall and burned part of it according to the condition of the wall as described in Neh 1:3. So there is at least a temporary victory here for the Samaritan opposition in the times of Ezra.

Verse 24 and here he returns to the opposition first related in vv 1-5 that began under Cyrus and continued until the time of Darius. So this doesn’t connect with verse 23, it connects with verses 4-5, everything in between is a parenthesis discussing further opposition that came from the Samaritans. So verse 4, when **the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate them,** then verse 24, **work on the house of God in Jerusalem ceased, and it was stopped until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.** That second year of Darius was 520BC and that’s when two prophets arise in chapter 5, Haggai and Zechariah rise up and they encourage the people to get off their duffs and finish rebuilding the Temple.

In summary, Ezra 4 recounts the initial opposition to the building of the Temple during the reign of Cyrus in 535BC. At first the Samaritans tried to infiltrate the ranks of Israel by telling the truth but not the whole truth. Zerubbabel and Jeshua well knew that while they did worship the God of

Israel they also worshipped other idols and sacrificed on high places. To permit them to join hands with them in building the temple would lead to syncretism and subsequent discipline by God just as their forefathers. As strong leaders they stood fast against this deceptive scheme. In response these enemies discouraged them, frightened them and bribed counselors to frustrate their rebuilding efforts. As a result the Jews stopped rebuilding the temple until Darius' second year in 520BC when God raised up Haggai and Zechariah to encourage them to finish the rebuilding. As Ezra recounted this opposition it reminded him of further opposition that occurred during the reign of Ahasuerus when a legal accusation was made against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. Further, in the days of Artaxerxes there was opposition to rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. The overwhelming idea is that the enemies of God are always active in opposing God's people.

In conclusion there are several lessons we can learn from this chapter. First, the people of God who follow the will of God face opposition from the enemies of God. It was clearly God's will for the Jews to return to the land after the exile and rebuild the Temple. This was necessary to fulfill Messianic prophecies on down the road. Therefore the people faced opposition that was satanically motivated. In the same way, believers in the Church who follow the will of God for their lives will face opposition from the enemies of God. God's will for our lives is clearly spelled out in the NT epistles. He wants us to fulfill the great commission by making disciples, learning loyalty to Him through His word, taking every thought captive, dying to self and living for Christ, putting on the full armor of God through prayer knowing that we are involved in a great angelic conflict. If we do such things we should expect opposition from Satan. Second, historic cases of opposition encourage God's people to stay the course and not be intimidated. Ezra recorded three historic cases of opposition to encourage later Jews who faced similar opposition. They should be encouraged knowing that they are not the first ones to face opposition, prior generations faced opposition too! We can take the same lesson over into our lives. We are not the first generation of Christians that have faced opposition, many Christians have gone before us in every century of the church that have faced opposition; the apostles were martyred, the believers under Diocletian were fed to the lions, the reformers were burned at the stake and so on and so forth. If we face opposition we should not be discouraged but encouraged that other believers have faced the same opposition. Third, true leaders stand against syncretism that will lead the

people astray. Zerubbabel and Jeshua stood against the deceptive words of the Samaritans that sounded so kind and non-combative. Satan masks as an angel of light. True leaders see through deceptive words and are able to stand against their suggestions. We cannot compromise the truth. Rat poison is 99.9% edible but it's that 0.1% that will kill you. That is why it is important to have ministries like Lighthouse Trails, Apprising Ministries and Psychoheresy Awareness Ministries to keep track of all the deceptive and manipulative schemes of Satan that draw Christians aside. Leaders in the church should be aware of the devil's schemes and warn their people to stand against them lest they become like them.

¹ There were two other kings that ruled in between Cyrus and Darius I, Cambyses from 530-522BC and Pseudo-Smerdis in 522BC. We can conclude that opposition continued during the reigns of both of these men as well.

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