

## **Ezra 4:6-24**

From the perspective of the first readers of Ezra, a century of trouble has already passed. From the initial opposition within a year of the Jews' return (**Ezra 4:4**) to the opposition mentioned a decade and a half later when Darius assumed the throne (**Ezra 4:5**) to the opposition half a century later in the time of Ahasuerus (**Ezra 4:6**), and finally to the continuing opposition in the days of Artaxerxes (**Ezra 4:7-24**), trouble dogged the Jews at every step.

What emerges is the picture of "little faith" in the face of relentless opposition.

### **Summary**

**Ezra 4:6-24 outlines the historical events associated with the continued opposition to the rebuilding of the temple and the city walls which point to timeless lessons for God's people facing opposition.**

#### **1. Practical Lessons Revisited vv. 6-24**

The first readers of Ezra, (circa 440 B.C.) were given a lesson in church history in the form of "a century of opposition."

First lesson - It has never been easy for the people of God.

Second lesson - relatively long periods of time may pass without the benefit of divine intervention in either good leadership or spiritual renewal.

#### **2. More Practical Lessons vv. 6-24**

**Third lesson: a period of trials can make us lose sight of God.**

At the time Ezra was written, the people in Jerusalem were in "great trouble and shame" (**Neh. 1:3**). They had long since abandoned the project of rebuilding the city. Trials had discouraged them about God's promises, and their own resources looked pitifully small to undertake such a task.

Ezra was sent to Jerusalem by Artaxerxes in **458BC** to ensure that worship in the temple conformed to divine standards. Ezra's influence, initially at least, did not bring revival. Not until the seventh month of **444 BC** would something resembling a revival appear. Despite Ezra's considerable input, the worship in the temple during the first half of the fifth century was not all that it should have been. It remained a time of spiritual poverty and shallowness, one in which God's people had lost sight of much of God's glory.

#### **Fourth lesson: trials can sometimes be the result of sin.**

When he heard about the state of the city of Jerusalem, Nehemiah made confession of his sins and those of his fellow Jews (**Neh. 1:6–7**)

Not every trial is the result of sin (**Job 1:1; cf. 1:8; 2:3; John 9:1-3**).

Yet the Bible does teach that sometimes suffering is divine chastisement for sin (**Heb 12:5-11**).

Discipline can lead to weariness (**Heb 12:5**) and embitterment (**Heb 12:15**).

It can cause the hands to droop and the knees to grow weak and feeble (**Heb 12:12**).

This is what occurred following Ezra's visit to Jerusalem.

Without "looking to Jesus" (**Heb 12:2**), spiritual depression often is the likely response to painful and difficult trials. Without faith in Christ, we are unable to see that trials are evidence of our adoption (**Heb 12:7**).

Without this perspective, trials merely discourage and condemn without showing the way out of despair.

This is why the author of Hebrews exhorts weary Christians bowed down under the burden of trials to "run with endurance the race . . . looking to Jesus" (**Heb 1–2**).

#### **Fifth Lesson: spiritual depression is the result of theological ineptitude.**

We fail to "consider" the implications of what Christ has done for us and what he now calls on us to do (**Heb. 12:3–4**).

We have "forgotten" the implications that are a consequence of being a child of God (**Heb 12:5**).

We may know the truth but fail to understand how to apply it, being "unskilled in the word of righteousness" (**Heb 5:13**).

This underlines the importance of Ezra's calling as a preacher and teacher.

Trials are God's school in which we are trained in the ways of righteousness.

The point that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are stressing:

Learn from trials.

Learn to see them as the instruments that call Christians back to God.

Learn to see them as God's prompts to keep believers watchful and awake.

Learn to view them as part of the Lord's sovereign providence to help Christians long for the world to come.

Learn to ponder them, evaluate them, and submit to them.

Learn reality! Look to Jesus always and learn to give God all the glory.