

Ezra 4:1-5

Opposition and discouragement is an important recurring theme throughout redemptive history for the people of God, (see **Ezra 4**).

Opposition is a constant theme from this point onward, right through until the end of the book of Ezra and into the book of Nehemiah.

This tells us that the kingdom of God is built within enemy-occupied territory.

Summary

Ezra 4:1-5 shows that opposition was the reason why the work on building the temple ground to a halt.

1. Rightly Declined Offer Revisited vv. 1-4

As the work began on rebuilding the temple, a delegation arrived in the city who were “adversaries of Judah and Benjamin.” Their offer to help rebuild the temple was flatly refused. Danger lay here in the guise of a genuine offer of help. These delegates are “enemies of the cross of Christ,” to be resisted with unrelenting zeal.

2. Crippling Disappointment vv. 4-5

Having had their offer of help refused, the “people of the land” turned to a strategy of systematic discouragement. This strategy was employed in Jerusalem with devastating success. Having begun the work of rebuilding the temple, the Jews turned away from the task altogether, until Ezra later appeared on the scene.

It would take twenty years before the task was completed.

Two things are significant and worthy of note:

First, the Jews were discouraged and afraid to go on building (**Ezra 4:4**).

Through a campaign of physical and psychological intimidation and threats, the reconstruction work came to a standstill.

The campaign of intimidation was most likely mainly verbal, pointing out the difficulty of the task and the futility of building something that, according to some of their number, would never be as glorious as Solomon’s temple (**Ezra 3:12**).

Secondly, there was a diplomatic offensive against the returned exiles in the halls of power in Persia (**Ezra 4:5**). A campaign was initiated to dislodge the Jews’ favorable status with their Persian overlords. Apparently, the Samaritans and their friends hired professional counselors to maintain this assault right up to the reign of Darius, which began in 522 B.C., about fourteen years into the future.

By hearing suggestions that building such a temple would only increase the Jews' desire for complete independence and encourage their expansionist policies, the Persians became less amenable to the Jewish resettlement policy.

Personal discouragement at the magnitude of the task drained away the spirit of enterprise, diminished the effort of building, and led to apathy and inertia. **(4:24)**. Discouragement is a deadly virus. It saps energy, cripples motivation, and turns folk inward. Are you discouraged by the slow progress of kingdom work? Does it often seem to us that for every step forward we make in the Christian life, we find ourselves making two backward?

3. Dealing with Discouragement

A three part strategy for dealing with discouragement in the Christian life is seen in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

First, we must recognize that the Christian life consists in trials and difficulties of all sorts and that no gains are to be made without enduring such hostilities.

This is the constant theme of Scripture. Knowing this about the Christian life means that we are not caught off guard when the storm breaks.

Secondly, we need to learn from the mistake that the people of God made here in Ezra. They allowed themselves to fall victim to discouragement.

They lost sight of the goal and, more importantly, lost sight of God.

The answer to the Jews' predicament did not lie in themselves. They needed to believe in the God who had brought them back from Babylon and resettled them in the land and who continued to work out His purpose in sending His Anointed One to save His people from all their enemies; not just hostile people of the land but from sin, the devil and death. They needed to look to the God "who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.

Amen." **(Eph. 3:20-21)**.

What is conspicuously absent in this chapter is any indication of prayer to the God of heaven to intervene and without prayer we can expect nothing from the hand of God.

Thirdly, the exiles failed to exercise faith in the Lord. Faith in the Lord will keep us hanging on to God despite discouragements that we feel, real and imaginary. Faith in the Lord takes hold of the reality of the opposition and brings it before God, only to see afresh that God is stronger than the might of the fiercest enemy.

That is the faith we need to keep hanging on when times are difficult and enemies abound but we cannot do it in our own strength and so we must look away from ourselves to Christ who has done it all to receive the strength to persevere in such faith.