

Ezra & Nehemiah; Lesson 4 Facing Opposition

Memory Verse

Ezra 5:5 (NKJV) *But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, so that they could not make them cease till a report could go to Darius. Then a written answer was returned concerning this matter.*

(458-457 BC). During the period of Ezra three other prominent non-biblical leaders lived: Gautama Buddha in India (ca. 560-480 BC), Confucius in China (551-479 BC), and Socrates in Greece (470-399 BC)

PK 572 During the reign of Cambyses the work on the temple progressed slowly. And during the reign of the false Smerdis (called Artaxerxes in Ezra 4:7) the Samaritans induced the unscrupulous impostor to issue a decree forbidding the Jews to rebuild their temple and city.

Opposition Begins

Ezra 4:1–5 (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, ² 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." ³ But Zerubbabel and Joshua 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." ⁴ Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, ⁵ 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.*

Whenever the devil sees we are building up God's kingdom he will stir opposition.

Acts 6:8 (NKJV) *And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.*

Acts 8:1 (NKJV) *Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*

Why did the Israelites refuse the help of the Samaritans?

2 Kings 17:24–34 (NKJV) *Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities. ²⁵ And it was so, at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they did not fear the Lord; therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which killed some of them. ²⁶ So ... ²⁷ Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, "Send there one of the priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land." ²⁸ Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the Lord. ²⁹ However every nation continued to make gods of its own, and put them in the shrines on the high places which the Samaritans had made, ³² So they feared the Lord, ... yet served their own gods—according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away. ³⁴ To this day they continue practicing the former rituals;*

2 Corinthians 6:14–18 (NKJV) ¹⁴ *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? ¹⁵ And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." ¹⁷ Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." ¹⁸ "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."*

Prophets Encourage

Ezra 5:1–2 (NKJV) *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.*

Haggai 1:3–9 (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?" 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.”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.

Haggai 2:9 (NKJV) *‘The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘And in this place I will give peace,’ says the Lord of hosts.”*

Haggai 2:18–19 (NKJV) *‘Consider now from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of the Lord’s temple was laid—consider it:¹⁹ Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded fruit. But from this day I will bless you.’ ”*

“The prophets Haggai and Zechariah were raised up to meet the crisis. In stirring testimonies these appointed messengers revealed to the people the cause of their troubles. The lack of temporal prosperity was the result of a neglect to put God’s interests first, the prophets declared. Had the Israelites honored God, had they shown Him due respect and courtesy, by making the building of His house their first work, they would have invited His presence and blessing.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 573, 574.

Work Stoppage

Ezra 4:13 (NKJV) *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.*

Ezra 4:18–21 (NKJV) *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.*

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.²¹ Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me.*

As a result the regional authorities quickly went to Jerusalem “and forbade the Jews to build the city and the temple” (Ibid.). Thus the rebuilding, according to Josephus, was interrupted till the second year of Darius.

Nehemiah Takes Action

Nehemiah 4:1–3 (NKJV) *But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews.² And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish—stones that are burned?”³ Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall.”* **He Prays** ⁴*Hear, O our God,*

Nehemiah 4:6 (NKJV) *So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.* **Vs. 7 they became very angry,**

Revelation 12:12 (NKJV) *... Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.”*

Neh. 4:13, 14, (NKJV) *“Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses”*

Neh. 4:19, 20 (NKJV) *“Our God will fight for us”*

Doing a “Great Work”

Nehemiah 6:1–4 (NKJV) *Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and that there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates),² that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono.” But they thought to do me harm.³ So I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?”⁴ But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner.*

Matthew 27:41–42 (NKJV) *Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said,⁴² “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.*