

Hurst Green

9th Jun 19

Ezra 4

All kinds of opposition

The Israelites have been mightily blessed

- God stirred the heart of Cyrus to issue his decree
- 50,000 heard the call and decided to go
- Their neighbours gave them huge amounts of silver and Gold
- They crossed 1000 miles of desert safely
- They rebuilt that massive altar
- Celebrated the feast of the seventh month
- They laid the foundations of the temple.

All is going well!

As we have found out though when things are going well the devil likes to get in and stop things and this is our lesson for today. How to recognise the tricks of the devil and how he will stop us working.

But only if we let him! We must always remember:

James 4:7 (ANIV)

⁷ ~~Submit yourselves, then, to God.~~ Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

You, and therefore we, are more powerful than the devil. But remember James 4:7 starts with “*Submit yourselves then to God*”

You cannot just go off in your own strength and expect the devil to get out of your way – submit yourself to God and then the devil will flee. Of course that may require you to hike through 1000 miles of desert but that is submitting yourself to God!!

Verse 1 says that the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that they were building a temple to the God of Israel. We cannot build, whether a church building to further the ministry or building our own spiritual lives, without the enemy hearing about it. He will come prowling, subtly at first, but more aggressively if we resist his first attempts. To be forewarned is to be forearmed – So here is your forewarning!

We must know that the enemy will oppose us.

1 Peter 5:8 (ANIV)

⁸ Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

It would be too easy if he just did it to our face. Then we could see him and his nasty tricks and decide to resist him. He then has to flee!! The bible says he has to and he must obey the word of God.

His attacks will come mainly in two ways

- He will attempt to infiltrate us and so use our trust to derail us.
- He will irritate us in niggling ways to delay and discourage us.

Now some of the ways he will use. Sit up and pin your ears back because these apply in every area of your Christian life and not just when you are sent to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.

Firstly he will try and get us to **compromise** our mission.

He did this with the Israelites during the Exodus. Moses was up the mountain being give the commandments and the people went and demanded an idol. Aaron, rather than standing firm, compromised and a generation was lost.

Going into the Promised Land Israel compromised and did not clear out the native tribes and that formed the basis of Israel's problems through many of the remaining years.

So here the enemies' first ploy was:

Ezra 4:2 (ANIV)

² ~~they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said,~~ "Let us help you build because, like you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here."

Having arrived back although they were 50000 strong they had a shed load of work to do and could always use more help. Here they have the perfect offer – the locals want to help them! How good is that?

The answer comes as a bit of a slap in the face:

Ezra 4:3 (ANIV)

³ ~~But Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered,~~ "You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us."

Yet they were right to do this. You need to view the bible as one and understand bits from different parts – in this case 2 Kings 17:24-32.

When Babylon settled a land they wanted to take control of it and so mixed the people up. When Israel left and went into captivity then people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharaim came and settled Israel.

But the rest of that reading tells the real problem. They were sent a priest to tell them how to worship the Lord but they did not pick up on the fact that he is the only God to be worshipped.

They blended worshipping their gods with worshipping the real God. Remember when you read of the Samaritans in Jesus time that these were the same people and that is the reason for the antagonism between the Samaritans and the Jews.

Yes the Samaritans worshipped God but they also had their high places where they worshipped their gods!

They came to the people of Jerusalem and spoke the truth – they had been worshipping God but it was only part of the truth.

If they helped then Israel would be polluted just as it had been polluted by compromise so many times in its past. You don't drink water that is only a little polluted because it is still polluted!

Don't compromise!

Today our faith is under pressure to fall in with other faiths; some even claim to be Christian but we must recognise them for what they are – they are Heathen and can have no part of building the temple of God. That may be in extending the Kingdom, it may be in building, or using, Church buildings or it may be in building ourselves as the temple of God today.

If you compromise sooner or later you will have to tear that part down and rebuild and that can be painful.

Then the enemy will use **discouragement**.

Ezra 4:4 (ANIV)

⁴ *Then the peoples around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building.*

Apart from hiring counsellors we are not given any details of how this took place but the fact they were counsellors might imply more infiltration.

This could include many methods from outright opposition which we see later in this chapter through to rumours.

Today it would certainly include social media and false news. Anyone can post anything and be treated as an expert and bad news always travels fast.

The devil will always try and get us to agree that our work is in vain and will make no difference to eternity whereas we know that our work will change eternity as people move from the rule of law to the freedom of living submitted to Christ.

Then the enemy uses the tool of **fear**

Ezra 4:4 (ANIV)

⁴ ~~*Then the peoples around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building.*~~

Fear can follow discouragement or can be generated in many other ways.

How many great ministries have never happened because people became afraid? That is a question I cannot answer but I am determined it will not be here. Always remember

1 John 4:18 (ANIV)

¹⁸ *There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*

We have a faith that is of love not fear and that is what we preach – that is the gospel we share.

The he uses **misinformation**.

Again we return to these counsellors and the modern day misinformation. These are often based in truth as we have seen with the Samaritans earlier.

And how many times do we see this used against Jesus in the New Testament.

And the best example from here is the rest of the Chapter which is called “Later Opposition Under Xerxes and Artaxerxes”

They sent a letter to the King. They told him about the rebuilding of Jerusalem and how this had been a nest of vipers in the past. True.

They suggest a search is made of the archives to show this if this is correct. It is.

So far so true.

Then they inform the king he will be left with no lands in what we now call the Middle East – False information.

They did not tell the whole story. They did not say that Cyrus had commanded it and so it was legitimate.

They are not told of the loyalty of the Israelites – remember Daniel or that they prayed for the success of Babylon (Jer 29:7)

Today the enemy uses the same tricks – he doesn’t do new things every morning – he will use misinformation against you and against us. He will mingle it with the truth so that it more readily deceives but it is still misinformation.

However a caveat. Do not assume all criticism is misinformation or you give the enemy a new attack method.

Discern!

Test!

Check!

Then you will know misinformation from truth

3 John 1:3 (ANIV)

³ *It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth.*

Beware also he will use **coalitions**.

Verse 7 – Associates!

The devil will gather together a rag tag and bob tail army of whoever he can find to oppose the work of our God.

This tactic is still used by dictators everywhere who try and get various groups of people to unite to hate some figure or group of people.

He is desperate – he will do anything!

But his army is weaker than ours. We have to fight back as we will get on to but in this case he managed to delay it all by some 15 years.

He will use **Government edicts**.

This is not a popular one but we need to watch out for it.

Here they got Artaxerxes to issue a decree to stop work which they obeyed because we are told to obey our rulers!

Today this is happening across the world – even in our own country.

I was recently sent a news link of two events that happened in the same week that contrasted the response to a Christian preaching the bible in public and a muslim preaching against all those who do not believe in Islam.

The muslim was being so offensive that people were objecting and that does not happen lightly in this country today. But there was a policeman telling the objecting listeners that he had the right to express his opinion.

The Christian however was arrested for a hate crime and taken off to the police station.

Beware – it is happening.

So how do you respond?

The wrong ways.

- **Give up** and go back.

You start with enthusiasm, get discouraged and go back to how it was. You are the stony ground.

An example that is close to home. How many of you do not invite people to church because they have not said yes in the past? You have given up!

- You **accept what you have** and do not seek God's aim for your life. For them – we are out of Babylon and things are better than they were; this is good enough.

For us – we are better than we used to be. That is not enough; as I hope I challenged you last week there is always more we need to be doing. Last week it was simply about our worship but we could be changing the world!! If you don't believe that we could change this nation!! If you won't believe that we could change this area.

If you don't believe that how many of you were at the meeting about withdrawal of East Surrey consultants from the health centre?

- Or we **blame the leaders**. That's an easy one and translates to someone else should have done this.

This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have.

If it needs doing – look for it, see it and do it because it is part of the good works that God has prepared for you to do.

- **It's not God's time**

While God does have a time table and we need to see it it is very easy to be spiritually lazy and decide if it is not done without too much effort then it is not God's time for it.

Any of the great Christian movements could have ended this way but they had people who pushed on through. How much better to be one of them than someone who just sat back!

Strategies for overcoming this could fill several pages and several weeks' sermons and so for time I will limit myself.

1. **Know your enemy.**

In many places the bible shows us how, by knowing how the enemy operates, we can resist him. To use an easy example if Adam had knew what the bible says about the devil we may not have ended up in this mess.

2. **Resist the enemy.**

I have already mention James on this. All you have to do is put on your spiritual armour and stand firm.

3. **Submit and draw near to God**

These must go hand in hand!! As I have mentioned James starts with "*submit to God*" and later he says "*Draw near to God and he will draw near to you*". I am sure I do not have to point out who does the most work in that one.

However if you are in any doubt consider the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Man is laid back being casual while God is stretching down from heaven trying to make contact.

4. And finally, at least for this talk, **Persevere.**

This is not a short fight it is a mammoth. When God tells you, or us, to do something then it is worth doing and so we must keep on keeping on.

Remember the scout motto and be prepared – opposition will happen and must be overcomers for the Kingdom of Heaven to touch earth and we want to be a part of that – don't we?