

SERMON FOCUS: I must expect opposition in doing the Lord's work.

BACKGROUND:

1. Israel had committed much idolatry and mistreated people and were exiled from their land by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.
2. God allowed this punishment, because of their idolatry.
3. The city of Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed.
4. After seventy years, Persia conquered Babylon and the Persian king allowed the Jews to return to rebuild the temple.
5. Two weeks ago, we discussed the rebuilding of the altar and the resumption of sacrifices.
6. Last week we saw that they finished the foundation of the temple and had a big celebration, although some preferred to look at the past instead.
7. This week we pick up with Chapter 4.

SCRIPTURE READING: Ezra 4:1-23

**1**When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple for the Lord, the God of Israel, **2**they approached Zerubbabel and the family heads and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we also worship your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time King Esar-haddon of Assyria brought us here."

**3**But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the other heads of Israel's families answered them, "You may have no part with us in building a house for our God, since we alone will build it for the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us." **4**Then the people who were already in the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build. **5**They also

bribed officials to act against them to frustrate their plans throughout the reign of King Cyrus of Persia and until the reign of King Darius of Persia.

**6**At the beginning of the reign of Ahasuerus, the people who were already in the land wrote an accusation against the residents of Judah and Jerusalem. **7**During the time of King Artaxerxes of Persia, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of his colleagues wrote to King Artaxerxes. The letter was written in Aramaic and translated.

**8**Rehum the chief deputy and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter to King Artaxerxes concerning Jerusalem as follows:

**9**From Rehum the chief deputy, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their colleagues — the judges and magistrates from Tripolis, Persia, Erech, Babylon, Susa (that is, the people of Elam), **10**and the rest of the peoples whom the great and illustrious Ashurbanipal deported and settled in the cities of Samaria and the region west of the Euphrates River.

**11**This is the text of the letter they sent to him:

To King Artaxerxes from your servants, the men from the region west of the Euphrates River:

**12**Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came from you have returned to us at Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and evil city, finishing its walls, and repairing its foundations. **13**Let it now be known to the king that if that city is rebuilt and its walls are finished, they will not pay tribute, duty, or land tax, and the royal revenue will suffer. **14**Since we have taken an oath of loyalty to the king, and it is not right for us to witness his dishonor, we have sent to inform the king **15**that a search should be made in your predecessors' record books. In these record books you will discover and verify that the city is a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces. There have been revolts in it since ancient times. That is why this city was destroyed. **16**We advise the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are finished, you will not have any possession west of the Euphrates.

**17**The king sent a reply to his chief deputy Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their colleagues living in Samaria and elsewhere in the region west of the Euphrates River:

Greetings.

**18**The letter you sent us has been translated and read in my presence. **19**I issued a decree and a search was conducted. It was discovered that this city has had uprisings against kings since ancient times, and there have been rebellions and revolts in it.

**20**Powerful kings have also ruled over Jerusalem and exercised authority over the whole region west of the Euphrates River, and tribute, duty, and land tax were paid to them. **21**Therefore, issue an order for these men to stop, so that this city will not be rebuilt until a further decree has been pronounced by me. **22**See that you not neglect this matter. Otherwise, the damage will increase and the royal interests will suffer.

**23**As soon as the text of King Artaxerxes's letter was read to Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their colleagues, they immediately went to the Jews in Jerusalem and forcibly stopped them.

## INTRODUCTION:

Today from this passage, we're going to see five ways that the enemy will try to destroy us and what we need to do about these tactics.

## MESSAGE:

### 1. THE ENEMY WILL TRY TO INFILTRATE

- a. (4:1-2) **1**When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple for the Lord, the God of Israel, **2**they approached Zerubbabel and the family heads and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we also worship your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time King Esar-haddon of Assyria brought us here."

- b. These people claimed to be worshipping God and wanted to help build the temple.
- c. 2 Kings 17 gives some history on these people.
  - i. They were exiled to what had been the northern kingdom and intermarried with the people left there.
  - ii. They brought their false gods and worshipped them.
  - iii. God sent lions to kill them, so the king of Assyria sent one of their priests back to teach them about “the God of the land.”
  - iv. What they wound up with was a compromised religion that was a blend of idol worship and sacrifice to God.
  - v. This is why the author of Ezra calls them “enemies.” They are enemies of the true faith.
- d. The enemy has largely infiltrated the Western Church.
  - i. Liberal Theology: Did God *really* say?
  - ii. Ungodly alliances:
  - iii. Bringing ungodly ideologies into Christianity, such as prosperity gospel and LGBTQ.
  - iv. BTW, the denominations that have embraced these ungodly ideologies are now in decline. Why? If you behave like the world, there is no reason for people to leave the world and come to you!
- e. If Zerubbabel and Jeshua had allowed these to help with construction, they would have brought their false religion into the new temple.
- f. They held fast to true doctrine, as the church must today.
- g. If the enemy infiltrates the church, he will destroy the church from the inside.

- h. If the enemy cannot infiltrate, such as these people of the land were unable to, the next tactic is discouragement.

## 2. THE ENEMY WILL TRY TO DISCOURAGE

- a. (4:4) Then the people who were already in the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build.
- b. The literal Hebrew expression is “weakened the hand.”
- c. The enemies put mental and physical obstacles in their way to stop their progress.
- d. Does that still happen to us?
  - i. You don’t really need to go to church?
  - ii. Sharing the gospel is scary?
  - iii. It’s so hard to take time to pray?
- e. If the enemy can discourage us, he can stop our forward progress.
- f. If infiltrating and discouraging don’t work, then the enemy will use our past against us.

## 3. THE ENEMY WILL USE OUR PAST AGAINST US

- a. (4:14-15) Since we have taken an oath of loyalty to the king, and it is not right for us to witness his dishonor, we have sent to inform the king that a search should be made in your predecessors’ record books. In these record books you will discover and verify that the city is a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces. There have been revolts in it since ancient times. That is why this city was destroyed.
- b. There is truth in what the accusers are saying. The city had never rebelled against Persia, but had rebelled against Assyria in 701 B.C., and Babylon in 600 B. C. and 589 B. C.

- c. They were using the “they’ve done it before and will do it again” argument.
- d. A report was released this week that is going to make our work as Southern Baptists even harder.
  - i. Twenty years of sexual abuses that were ignored and abusers being able to go from church to church.
  - ii. Presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention committing sexual assault.
  - iii. Pastors of churches covering up sexual assault.
  - iv. A seminary president covering up sexual abuse of a student, then wanting to meet with another victim to “break her down.”
  - v. A seminary professor committed sexual assault against a student, and when she told, the Baptist press article made it sound like an adulterous affair.
  - vi. The enemy is going to use this against us for years. It is heartbreaking and discouraging.
- e. What in your past is the enemy trying to use against you?
- f. If the truth about our past isn’t enough, the enemy will resort to lies.

#### 4. THE ENEMY WILL TELL LIES

- a. (4:16) We advise the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are finished, you will not have any possession west of the Euphrates.
- b. The Israelites were still working on the temple. They were not trying to rebuild the city and take back the nation.
- c. But the enemies’ ability to convince the king that they Jews would rebel is enough.
- d. They told the king that he would lose territory, he would lose honor, and he would lose money.

- e. The lies being told about us now are that we are hateful bigots who want to oppress people.
- f. Of course, we know the truth that we want to see people brought from death to life.
- g. Finally, if infiltrating, discouraging, using our past against us, and lying do not work, there is always physical force.

#### 5. THE ENEMY WILL USE FORCE

- a. (4:23) As soon as the text of King Artaxerxes's letter was read to Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their colleagues, they immediately went to the Jews in Jerusalem and forcibly stopped them.
- b. We are talking about military force authorized by the government to stop the work of the ministry.
- c. North Korea and China use these tactics to stop worship.
- d. Last year, police raided a church in London for COVID-19 violations.
- e. Last year, Canadian police barricaded a church to keep people from getting inside to worship.
- f. Are we still thinking that it cannot happen here?

#### CONCLUSION:

As long as we continue to worship the Lord in Spirit and in truth, the enemy will be arrayed against us. This should not cause us to fear. Instead, it should cause us to be resolute in speaking the truth without compromise. One truth is especially important today and that is those without Christ have no hope. Have you put your trust in Him?

Scripture quotations marked CSB have been taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.