

"FACING OPPOSITION IN GOD'S WORK" - EZRA 4

INTRO:

TAKE HOME: *When God moves in my life, I can expect the enemy to stir up trouble to stop it.*

THE ENEMY'S TACTICS TO DISRUPT GOD'S WORK (4:1-5)

1-3). *When God moves in a place, upon hearts of people, word naturally spreads. Some are blessed by the news, others are indifferent to it, and still others may even be upset! ...it can even become more than words - they actively seek to stop God's work.*

TACTIC #1 - COMPROMISE.

2) "Let US build WITH you..."

their reasoning: "we seek your God as you do...we have been making sacrifices for quite awhile now" ("since the days of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria" - 130 years before Jerusalem fell, Assyria came in and wiped out the northern kingdom of Israel. They imported people from Assyria to come live in the land and intermarry with the Jews, to slowly change the worship of Jehovah God to incorporate idolatry & superstition...

2 Kings 17:32-33. *"They worshiped the Lord, but they also appointed all sorts of their own people to officiate for them as priests in the shrines at the high places. They worshiped the Lord, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought."*

they became known as Samaritans! These Samaritans had a twisted view - "God among many other gods". (That is why the Jews & Samaritans of Jesus' day didn't get along. Jews viewed them as 1/2 breeds that polluted the true ways of God!)

NOTE: The enemy wants to find a way into the mix of your heart. To say, "Listen, I'm just like you. We are on the same page...serving the same God (he's just one of many). Let me help you and we can get this done faster and be unified." But deep down they are **"adversaries" (1)**...and adversaries only seek to bring adversity in one fashion or another.

One of the greatest threats to God's Church is not persecution from outside - that just spreads the gospel. It's compromise from inside. To let down our guard Biblically and allow the enemy to wiggle his way into things.

You and I must use discernment. We must go back to God's Word and let it direct our steps. To not give into the temptation of what's easiest for us. The issue is not about getting it done faster...or just being unified...it's about getting God's Work done God's Way.

Zerubbabel (civil leader) and **Jeshua** (high priest) & the tribal **leaders** said, "Um, no thanks!"

NOTE: they said **"You may do nothing with us...we will do this alone." (3)** They stood on King Cyrus' edict that they (JEWS) were to rebuild the temple.

They didn't even give them a lowly task. It was a "NO COMPROMISE. No foothold. No part." stance. Why? So that down the road they couldn't say, "We had a part in that!" And try to sway how worship should be.

NOTE 2 things:

1) If we are to do God's work, we may do it alone. *It may take longer & be harder to do...but in the end it's pleasing to God. Don't compromise just to get things done.*

2) When we are set to do God's work, stand in your convictions from the start. *Don't let the enemy think there's a chance to change things by subtle compromises.*

Having been shut down through compromise, the enemy doesn't give up...

4-5)

TACTIC #2 - DISCOURAGEMENT

How often when you don't compromise in your Biblical convictions, then the attacks get stronger (more often & more intense). The enemy says, "If you won't let me in, then I'll make it miserable for you." It's all to discourage you and make you give up!

These adversaries **"troubled them in building...hiring counselors to frustrate their purposes."** (bribed counselors in Persia)

trouble comes by lies & slander: "Did you hear what they said? What this person did? How can they be a leader and allow that?" The enemy is just looking for someone to open their ear to his whisper...then the trouble begins within.

trouble comes by delays & discouragements: how many churches trying to build a place of worship run into trouble with city officials that won't give permits because they simply don't like churches..., or a fire marshal has a chip on his shoulder and wants you to jump through unrealistic hoops. I've seen it over and over play out the same.

This was not just for a week or two troubling, but they caused the building to stop for years. It would take them 23 years from 1st decree by Cyrus, to finished project under Darius due to the enemy's tactics.

NOTE: Going forward with God isn't easy work. Expect the attacks & spiritual warfare. Expect it to be an "uphill battle" at times. BUT also expect that Your God will be victorious! It may take awhile to finish His work...your faith will be stretched like never before... At times you may even be wondering if it will ever happen...but in the end you will see that God wins and you'll have a testimony of His power over the enemy! **God's plans for you don't get derailed because the enemy discourages you!**

How exactly did they get the Jews to stop building legally when King Cyrus already put the decree out?

THE ENEMY'S CONTINUAL RECORD OF TELLING ON THE JEWS (4:6-24)

6-8) from v. 6-23 we are given a broad overview of how the Samaritans tried to disrupt God's Work from rebuilding the Temple (presently), all the way to rebuilding the city under Nehemiah 80 years later. They were a constant threat to God's work in Jerusalem.

King Ahasuerus (also called Cambyses) came to power in 529 BC (after Cyrus). New king, new opportunity to get your way. King Ahasuerus had to assert his leadership & the enemy used the opportunity to capitalize on it!

King Artaxerxes came to power later in 464 BC. So the letters that started with Ahasuerus and the Temple being rebuilt, continued all the way through Artaxerxes and the city walls being rebuilt in Nehemiah's day (that's why both are named here) This is a summation of the enemy's efforts to stop the total work of God in Jerusalem.

So the enemies of the Jews rallied their political squad & wrote this **accusation** against the Jews to the king.

9-10). This "squad" is made up of a military commander (**Rehum**), a scribe (**Shimshai**), & representatives from various peoples & districts & **"the rest of the nations"** settled in Samaria by **Osnapper**)

why is this list important to note?

NOTE: Part of the enemy's tactic to get his way is to rally powerful influencers to his side.

TACTIC #3 - PRESSURE.

"If the Jews won't stop willingly, then we will force them to legally through various means!"

Are you feeling the pressure to cave spiritually? Family mocks you ...workplace boss...legal action is taken against you to stop you from standing up for Biblical values.

11-16) NOTE 3 things they did:

1) their ACCUSATIONS & CONDEMNATIONS...painting them as a **rebellious and evil people & city (12)** (though true in their history, they were still God's people.)

The enemy always takes a problem or mistake and capitalizes on it. “That is why they were destroyed! Check the records!” Yes it’s true. He accuses, then condemns, then markets it & magnifies it publicly - all to keep you trapped in that past sin & keep you from moving forward with God.

TACTIC #4 - ACCUSATIONS & CONDEMNATION

NOTE: the enemy often attacks us with truths and lies to get God’s work to stop. At times he may use outright lies, but he also uses truths about our sinfulness. Accusing us before the King of Kings, condemning us for failing...

Satan attacks us with truth & lies and he undermines the powerful work of Christ to forgive!

But we know the end of the story...

Revelation 12:10. “Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.

he accuses us day & night before God, but one day he will be kicked out of the courts of heaven!

Rev. 12:11 “They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

How do I deal with the accusations & condemnation? 1) the blood of the Lamb - cleanses my sin...2) the word of our testimony - God has changed me! The evidence is clear!...3) my life is His from here on out - no stopping me now! Not even death can separate me from the love of God!

2) their ANTICIPATION (play on fear)...”if this city is built & walls complete they won’t pay taxes and the king’s treasury will be diminished” (13)...”if this city is rebuilt and it’s walls are completed, you will lose control over the area” (16). (at this point the Temple had been rebuilt for 50 years...they only mention the city & walls being rebuilt as the problem - in the days of Nehemiah now) but they are playing upon the king’s losses and fears of economic troubles...”if this city is rebuilt you will lose money, control, and influence!”

TACTIC #5 - FEAR OF LOSS.

NOTE: How many times does the enemy stir up fear to get us to panic and go his way? But God’s Word says, “Do not fear” over and over...He gives us His peace from His Spirit...and as we trust Him and obey His Word, we find Him working in us and through us. His peace prevails over the fear.

You know it’s the enemy at work when lies and fear are found along the pathway!

3) their MOTIVATION (flattery moves)...”it was not proper for us to see the king’s dishonor”(14) (we are only looking out for you Oh great king of ours!)

TACTIC #6 - FLATTERY

the enemy uses flattery to mask his sinful motives! Encouragement seeks to give & build up others; flatter seeks to take for self & tear down others. This squad only wanted to see God’s work stop in Jerusalem. “How” it went down was negotiable: compromise, discouragement, pressure moves, lies, fear, flattery - it all was for 1 goal in the end!

17-22) historical records showed failures & rebellion when under Babylon (Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah - 2 Kings 24)...records also showed a powerful rule over areas under David & Solomon; Hezekiah & Joash...and because of all that - the king gave into the request in fear of a loss.

23) They now had the authority to make the Jews stop by force (military arms)! And so they ran quickly to do just that.

NOTE: Here we see the effects of those accusations & condemnation from the enemy. It stops the work of God in you. That renewed worship ceases. That fresh joy & communion with God is gone. You start believing your past failures define you. You start losing heart that anything would ever change. Ultimately You've really lost sight of the work of the cross & the word of the Lord - God's promise to save & make new...

Romans 8:1. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,"

The enemy comes to condemn; the Spirit comes to convict. The enemy pushes you away from God; the Spirit drives you to Him. The enemy always brings up your past; God always points you to the future. Conviction leads to repentance & restoration & life. Condemnation leads only to death.

Who are you listening to...what is it producing in you... & where is that road ultimately headed?

Remember v. 6-23 was a summation of the Samaritans work through the whole time of rebuilding the Temple and city of Jerusalem (covering 80 years). Now v. 24 shifts us back to the present situation (v.1-5)... under Zerubbabel they are trying to rebuild the temple foundation and meeting resistance both in Jerusalem and in the Persia courts.

24) The Jews stopped rebuilding the Temple in 529 BC, it would begin again until 521 BC when Darius gave the order.

CLOSING: Can I see the enemy's tactics in my life to get me to stop rebuilding my walk & worshipping God?
sometimes it's compromise - temptations, easy roads, don't get so radical about Jesus!
discouragement - who am I to do this, why try it's hard...
pressure moves from powerful people over you...
lies, plays upon my fears, flatteries of my flesh...
or accusations & condemnation....

Will I give up and say, "Oh well I tried." Or will I stand on God's promise to me and stand in my Biblical convictions? Can I wait on His timing in it all and keep my eyes on the ultimate victory ahead in Jesus? God will do what He promised! God's work will be done because it's backed by ONE who cannot lie & cannot fail!

the Jews stopped building...the enemy seemed to get his way. But in time God will restart things and the enemy will ultimately be defeated.

Take heart - it's not over even when the enemy seems to be winning the day! Rise up, repent, and get back to building God's work in your life!

PRAY