

OPPOSITION TO RE-BUILDING THE TEMPLE AND THE WALLS

Ezra and Nehemiah

Hymns: # 32 To God Be the Glory; #462 Be Thou My Vision;

Readings: Ezra 4:1-5; 24-5:3, 11
Nehemiah 2:17-20; 4:10-12; 6:1-4, 14-15
Haggai Ch.1

Background: Last week we saw the returned exiles rebuild the Altar on its foundation in spite of their fear of the people around them and we saw how they laid the foundation for the temple. Amidst the sounds of weeping and joy, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah ministered encouragement. Today we are going to see the inevitable pushback by the enemies of God and God's prophetic message and ministry that overcomes it.

1) OPPOSITION TO REBUILDING

A) WHO ARE THE ENEMIES

i) The "Nice enemies"- Ezra 4:1-5- "Let us help you

ii) v.2 They are the exiled pagans from the surrounding countries brought to the land of Judah by Esarhaddon, King of Assyria.

(1) 2 Kings 17:29-34 idol worshippers of Succoth Benoth, Nergal, Ashima; Nibhaz and Tartak, the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire as sacrifices to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. 32 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. 33 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.** 34 To this day they persist in their former practices.

(a) Can we identify these enemies today?

(b) Carnal, worldly, idolaters..."wolves in sheep's clothing"

iii) The "Not so nice enemies"

(1) Neh.2:19 Satanic inspired enemies and anti-Semitism were alive and well in Nehemiah's day and embodied in: Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab.

(2) Sanballat - name means "Sin gives life". Derived from "Sin" + "Allat" (Feminine form of 'Allah' and the name of one of Allah's three daughters: Al-Lat, Al-Uzza and Manat).

(a) Sin was the Moon God worshipped throughout Mesopotamia, particularly in Ur of the Chaldeans and north in Haran. Sin worship was brought to Arabia by Nabonidus, the co-regent of Babylon and the father of Belshazzar in Daniel 5.

(b) Sin became known as "al ilha" meaning "the god". Al ilah became shortened to "allah". Allah was the Moon God in **pre Islamic** Arabia, and was known to Mohammed (d. 632 AD) and the Arab world of his day. Sin- allah was just one of 360 deities worshipped.

(c) Mohammed in effect said, 'You already worship the Moon God Sin, allah, now just get rid of the other 359 astral deities and worship this deity alone'.

(d) "Allah Akbar" does not mean "God is great". It means Sin- allah, the pre Islamic Moon God is "greater". That is, "greater" than all the other 359 known Arab astral deities and particularly greater than the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the Triune God of Grace.

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- (e) Thus Islam, then and now, represents the combined satanic inspired political-religious-ethnic opposition to the true and only God, Jews and Christians.
- (3) Tobiah the Ammonite
 - (a) Today this is Jordan whose capital is Amman and the surrounding countries of “the sword”.
 - (b) The Jordanian “Waqf” have the administrative control of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem today where now stands an idolatrous building dedicated to the Moon God- Sin- Allah; where once the first and second temples stood.
- (4) Gesham the Arab.
 - (a) Arabs are the 12 tribal clans and descendants of Ishmael-the son of the flesh; not Isaac who was the son of the promise.
 - (b) All sworn to wipe Israel off the map.
- (5) These historical enemies exist and persist to this very day even as 2 Kings 17 noted the existence and persistence of pagan idolatry up to the day that book was written.

B) WHAT DO THE ENEMIES DO?

- i) Ezra 4:2-5
 - (1) **Discourage** and make them **afraid** to go on building
 - (2) **Hire counsellors**
 - (a) **Work against them**
 - (b) **Frustrate** their plans
 - (i) Went on for 23 years!
- ii) Ezra 5:3
 - (1) Challenge the God given **authorization** and validity to be re-building the temple
 - (2) They seek to identify by name those involved so as to implicate in supposed evil
 - (3) They report them to the governmental authorities as involved in subversive activity.
 - (a) 10 days ago it was reported that a Hobart pastor will face Tasmania’s Anti-Discrimination Commission over online blogs comments written during Tasmania’s heated gay marriage.
<http://www.themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/antidiscrimination-commission-to-hear-complaint-over-hobart-preacher-campbell-markhams-blogs/news-story/faf220e76fb3281419182fd1892df5a1> A gay rights activist has defended the laws, which prohibit **offending** someone on the basis of things such as sexuality, saying they protect the LGBTI community from “hateful” language.
 - (b) Freedom of Biblical religious teaching and speech is under threat today.
 - (4) Can we not see the same tactics today?
 - (a) Political Correctness
 - (b) The Legal Attacks of the Liberal Left both in the world and the church
 - (c) The Cultural Moment’s Agenda for SSM and moral normalisation LGBTI lifestyle
- iii) Nehemiah, 2:19 **mock, ridicule**, 6:2 **conspire** and scheme to do **harm**; v.9 **frighten**, v.13 **intimidate** and **discredit**.
 - (1) These same tactics are seen played out on the nightly news in terrorist attacks.
 - (2) But these tactics are also played out within the “professing church” where both the doctrine and those who hold to it, of a Dispensational, Pre-Tribulational, Pre-Millennial eschatological view are increasingly mocked, ridiculed and discredited.

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- (a) Most clearly seen in Replacement Theology: another form of intellectual and theological anti-Semitism. It says the Church has replaced Israel as the recipient of God's covenant promises, rather than sharing in them. God is done with the Jews.
 - (i) Grounded historically in Augustine (once again!) who promulgated "Amillennialism", meaning there is no literal future fulfilment of a promised 1,000 year Kingdom reign of Christ on earth. Rather, it adopted an allegorical and spiritual re-interpretation of the Biblical text.
 - (ii) This view is held to this very day by Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodists, Churches of Christ and other denominations in the "reformed tradition".

C) RESULTS OF THE ENEMIES' WORK

- i) Ezra 4:24 Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia
 - (1) From 536-519- **17 years of inactivity** and a complete cessation of God's plan and purpose for rebuilding the Temple.
- ii) The enemies' tactics are actually quite successful....for a while.

D) Question: *Are you consciously aware of who "the puppets" of your real enemy are? What tactics do you find hitting closest to home for you?*

2) PROPHETIC MINISTRY: GOD'S PUSH BACK AND JUMP START

A) WHO ARE THE PROPHETS?

- i) Ezra 5:1 Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them.
 - (1) Haggai- The Old Prophet- to The Older- "When it all seems like nothing"
 - (2) Zechariah – The Young Prophet- to The Younger-"When it all seems so small"
- ii) Malachi- the last post exile prophet; wrote the last book of the OT 450-430 BC. Prophesied during Nehemiah's days of rebuilding the Walls of Jerusalem

B) WHAT THEY SAY AND DO

- i) Haggai Ch.1
 - (1) The people were still saying after 17 years of being intimidated into inactivity: v.2 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.'
 - (2) The prophet asks v.4 "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"
 - (3) v.5,7 **"Give careful thought to your ways"**
 - (a) You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."
 - (b) v.9 "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away"

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- (c) v.11 "I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labour of your hands."
- (d) v.9 Why?
 - (i) **"Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house"**
 - 1. A case of misplaced priorities.
 - 2. God has been relegated to sit in the back seat of people's lives, vision and priorities
 - ii) Zechariah Ch.14
 - (1) Encourages them to look to the future coming of the Messiah
 - (a) v.9 The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.
 - iii) Malachi
 - (1) Rebukes both people and priest alike for their unfaithfulness
 - (2) 3:1 promises the coming of John The Baptist; the first coming of Jesus
 - (3) 3:2 promises the Second Coming and Day of the Lord.
 - iv) Ezra 5:2 "And the prophets of God were **with** them, **helping** them."
 - (1) Present and involved not just "talking heads"

Question: *What does "living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" mean to you today? Have you ever felt that you expected much but it turned out to be little?*

C) FIVE KEY RESULTS OF PROPHETIC MINISTRY

- i) Ezra 5:11 **People re-discover who they are and announce it with boldness**
 - (1) "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple
 - (2) In the NT this is *παρρησία*-(par-rhay-see'-ah); freedom, openness, especially in speech; boldness, confidence. As in Eph. 6:19-20
- ii) 6:14 God Sovereignly intervenes politically, moving the hearts of three Persian kings
 - (1) Cyrus 1:1-2
 - (2) Darius 6:12
 - (3) Artaxerxes 7:21
 - (4) Prov. 21:1 "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases."
 - (5) Dan. 4:17 "the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes."
- iii) 6:14 Finished the work of building the Temple according to the command of God
 - (1) Only took 4 years to complete once they started building again
 - (2) Completed 515 BC on the 3rd of Adar (Feb/Mar)
 - (3) 23 Years after Cyrus' decree
 - (4) 70 years after the destruction of the Temple in 586 BC
- iv) Neh. 6:16 Finished the work of building the Wall of Jerusalem
 - (1) Only took 52 days; not even 8 weeks

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(2) Completed in 444 BC on the 25th of Elul (Aug/Sept)

v) Malachi 3:16-18 **"Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard.** A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honoured his name. 17 "They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. 18 And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not."

(1) God listens, records, treasures and distinguishes the faithful few, who in a time of general apostasy, will come together fear the Lord and honour His Name. They will be His and He will spare them the coming wrath when He once again makes a clear distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not."

5 APPLICATIONS FOR TODAY:

1. Whenever we put our hand to plough of service of God and His purposes we should expect and be prepared for opposition. Satan is our enemy; people who oppose God are simply puppets.
 - a. Eph. 6:10-2 "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. 19 Pray also for me that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly (**παρρησία**) make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly (**παρρησία**), as I should.
2. The enemies tactics are not new
 - a. 2 Cor.2:11 "in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.
3. We can waste a lot of time living in fear and intimidation; hiding our light under a bushel
4. Let us ensure we have our priorities in the right order
 - a. Glorify God
 - b. Equip the saints
 - c. Make disciples

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5. Let us keep looking for the “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13) of the promised coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus to snatch away His Church, remembering that God listens, records, treasures and distinguishes the faithful few, who in a time of general apostasy, will come together, fear the Lord and honour His Name. They will be His and He will spare them the coming wrath when He once again makes a clear distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.”