

Explore the Bible Series for December 10: God offers ways to overcome obstacles

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God offers ways to overcome obstacles

- Ezra 4:1-6:22

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The people of Judah began to rebuild the temple, and everything was progressing according to plan. Samaritan opposition to the rebuilding project developed. Conflict reared its ugly head, stalling a project that seemed to be going so well. Ezra 4 can serve as preparation for the opposition that will inevitably come in our lives.

Our confidence must be in God in order that we do not become frustrated by hindrances and adopt a pessimistic attitude. God still helps us accomplish our ministry tasks to enhance kingdom building. God expects us to continue with confidence as he works through us to accomplish his purposes.

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Facing opposition (Ezra 4:1-23)

“The adversaries of Judah and Benjamin” were the enemies in the region who resisted the reestablishment. The enemies endeavored to hinder the building of the temple. The enemies were the mixed race called Samaritans, the result of foreigners from Assyria (676 B.C.) being settled in the territory of the former northern kingdom by Esarhaddon (681-668 B.C.).

“We seek your God ... we do sacrifice unto him” was a false claim that represented the syncretistic worship of the Samaritans. The offer of help was a trap because it entailed a compromising union with semi-idolaters (2 King. 17:26-34).

Zerubbabel and Jeshua refused the Samaritans' offer of assistance in building the temple on the technicality that Cyrus gave permission only to the Jews to rebuild the temple. The exclusiveness of the Jews aroused the hostility of the “people of the land,” who opposed them “all the days of Cyrus ... even until the reign of Darius.”

Idolatry was the chief cause for Judah’s deportation to Babylon, and they wanted to avoid it altogether. While they still had their spiritual problems, they rejected any form of mixed religion, particularly the offer of cooperation that had sabotage as its goal.

Since their offer to help build the temple was rejected by the elders of Israel, the adversaries tried other methods of weakening the will of the Jews to build. They “hired counselors” who sought to turn Cyrus and Darius, kings of Persia, against the restoration of Jerusalem and the temple work. They accused the Jews of building with the thought of rebelling as before. As a result, the people took more interest in their personal affairs than spiritual matters (Haggai 1:2-6).

All this was the ongoing occurrence of severe animosity between the Israelites and Samaritans, and later was aggravated when the Samaritans built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim (John 4:9). The enemies were successful and caused a 16-year delay (circa 536-520 B.C.).

Overcoming hindrances (Ezra 4:24-5:17)

During the time of cessation of the work, the Lord began to stir up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah who were at Jerusalem. They began to encourage the Jews to resume the work on the temple regardless whether the decree would be confirmed. They were inspired of the Holy Spirit who knew the decree to build the temple would soon be confirmed and all hindrances by enemies would be defeated by civil authority.

The work actually was started through the prophets (vv. 1-2). When they gave prophecies that the work should begin again, the governor, Zerubbabel, rose up and began to build again.

The enemies of the Jews began again to hinder the work. They sent a letter to Darius urging him to cause the work to cease if he wished to maintain his control of this side of the Euphrates. However, Darius after learning of the original decree by Cyrus, reconfirmed it, and the work continued.

When the Jews began working on the temple again, the governor on the

western side of the Euphrates, Tatnai, came and demanded to know who had given the authority to build the temple when Artaxerxes had commanded the work to cease. Tatnai was governor of Syria, and Zerubbabel was governor in Judah.

The temple was finished in the sixth year of the reign of Darius, but the walls were not completed until many years later, under Nehemiah in the times of trouble (Nehemiah 2-6; Daniel 9:25).

Dedicating the temple (Ezra 6:1-22)

King Darius issued an order to a small group of officials to search the rolls. The records of Cyrus confirmed he had made a decree to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. The roll even gave dimensions of the temple.

The temple height was to be 60 cubits (125 ft.) and the length was to be 60 cubits (125 ft.). This was the same length as Solomon's temple, but the height is twice the size of Solomon's structure (2 Chronicles 3:3-4).

The returned exiles celebrated the first Passover at the new temple of Zerubbabel (v.19). These Jews are again addressed as "the children of Israel" (v. 21). There were many from Manasseh and Ephraim and the other tribes. The author concludes that Israelites of all the tribes are Jews, and all Jews are Israelites.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was celebrated for seven days with joy at the new temple of Zerubbabel (v. 22). By turning the heart of the king in their favor in allowing them to complete the rebuilding, God encouraged his people. Every king who succeeded the great Neo-Assyrian Empire regardless of what country they may have come from held the title "King of Assyria".

Discussion question

- What guidance does this passage offer on how to overcome hindrances while pursuing God's will?

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