

The Opposition of Rebuilding

Ezra 4:1-24

MEMORY VERSE

EZRA 4:23

“Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease.”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

A 1 lb. bag of unshelled peanuts and two large paper bags.

A medium size ball (about the size of a soccer ball).

Parchment paper (one sheet per child) or construction paper, markers, glue, and tongue depressors.

ATTENTION GRABBER!

God's Work May Seem Tough!

For this game you will need a 1 lb. bag of unshelled peanuts, two paper bags, and masking tape. God has work for us to do; but at times, there may be those who are opposed to it. Sometimes there are a lot of obstacles or things in our way when accomplishing what God wants us to.

Divide the class in half to form two equal teams. Have the children form two lines next to each other. At the opposite end of the classroom, place the two paper bags. The object of the game is to have the children take turns placing a peanut between their knees and hop or scoot to the other end and get the peanut into the bag. As a fun twist you could have a few other children try to distract or get in the way of the children with the peanuts (but remind the kids no hitting, tackling or rough-housing!). Their purpose is to be a distraction. You may also place chairs or books for obstacles.

The children with the peanut may *not* use their hands. If the peanut falls, they have to go back to the starting line and try again. See which team can get done first.

Ask the children how difficult this game was. Was it more difficult with all the “obstacles” in the way? Explain that God’s people in our story today had a lot of obstacles to get around. But God helped them to get His work accomplished. God also has a special work for us to do. It may not be something that is always easy to do. God will help us as well. You may want to allow the children to eat the peanuts afterwards. NOTE: Please check with parents to make sure there are no allergies to peanuts!

LESSON TIME!

Have you ever experienced times of opposition in your Christian walk? The word “opposition” can be defined as “hostile resistance or an obstacle that is set against someone.” Have you ever come across obstacles or hostile resistance? As you begin a good work for the Lord, obstacles may appear everywhere you turn.

In our lesson last week, the children of Israel were rejoicing, celebrating the completion of the foundation of the temple. God’s promise had come to pass! God had accomplished this big task using the talents and abilities of the people who had determined to serve Him. Laying the foundation was just the beginning. The people again set themselves to the task of rebuilding the temple, but there arose *opposition!*

EZRA 4:1-5

Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel,

they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here."

But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us."

Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building,

and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Adversaries (or enemies) of the children of Israel came to Zerubbabel and the chiefs of the people. They wanted to participate in the rebuilding of the temple. Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the chiefs would not allow them to help. They made a wise decision.

You may remember, the Assyrians had conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and had scattered the ten tribes throughout the world. Their strategy was to move conquered people to new lands. Foreigners from other lands were resettled in Israel. Fearing disfavor with the God of Israel, the foreigners sought help to learn how to worship God, yet the Bible says, "they feared Jehovah and worshiped their own gods" (2 Kings 17:33). God was added to their worship program; yet, they did not truly worship Him, nor were they the descendants of Israel. Their hearts were divided.

Compromise is dangerous. To allow their participation could cause the children of Israel to stray away from God. Notice, they were called the “people of the land,” not the people of God.

Sadly, they did not take well the rejection of their offer to participate. They began to discourage the people of Judah and “troubled them in building.” They went so far as to hire counselors to frustrate their efforts. The “people of the land” caused problems for the remaining five years of King Cyrus’ reign until the second year of the reign of Darius, fourteen years in all!

As Christians, we should be cautious to not fall into the traps of our enemy, Satan. Those who would work against us may try at first to join us. The enemy will use their involvement to cause us to compromise, to lose focus, and be made weak. It is always dangerous for us to spend too much time with “the people of the land.” 1 Corinthians 15:33 tells us, “Be not deceived; evil company corrupts good morals.” In 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 we read,

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore, "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."

“Unequally yoked” is a term referring to the use of two “unmatched” animals “yoked” or “tied” together on a cart or plow to do work. For instance, two horses pulling a cart or a plow would be a smooth operation. What would happen if one has a horse and an ox pulling the same cart? It would not be a smooth ride. They are different sizes and are built for different purposes. So, the Christian cannot join with a person of the world to accomplish God’s purposes, for he has very different values, goals, and purposes. We have been “called out,” a “separate” people--in this world, but not of this world.

EZRA 4:6-16

In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

In the days of Artaxerxes also, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabel, and the rest of their companions wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the letter was written in Aramaic script, and translated into the Aramaic language.

Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes in this fashion:

From Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; representatives of the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the people of Persia and Erech and Babylon and Shushan, the Dehavites, the Elamites,

and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnapper took captive and settled in the cities of Samaria and the remainder beyond the River; and so forth.

(This is a copy of the letter that they sent him) To King Artaxerxes from your servants, the men of the region beyond the River, and so forth:

Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing its walls and repairing the foundations.

Let it now be known to the king that, if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished.

Now because we receive support from the palace, it was not proper for us to see the king's dishonor; therefore we have sent and informed the king,

that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. And you will find in the book of the records and know that this city is a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, and that they have incited sedition within the city in former times, for which cause this city was destroyed.

We inform the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the result will be that you will have no dominion beyond the River.

The people of the land sent out quite an accusation to the king against the children of Israel who had returned to rebuild their temple. While they represented themselves as loyal to the king and concerned for his welfare; they represented the children of Israel as being disloyal to the king and a danger to his government. They represent Jerusalem as a “rebellious and bad city.” After throwing suspicion on the Jews and labeling them as a defiant people, the accusers conclude: “...if this city is rebuilt and its wall are completed, the result will be that you will have no dominion beyond the River.”

Note, their information concerning the building of the walls was not correct; for, the Jews had only begun to build the temple just as Cyrus had commanded them. No work had been done on the walls.

How sad the situation seems now! The opposition certainly knew how to present a powerful case—an accusation--against God’s people. As Christians, we too, face opposition and accusation. “Satan is the accuser of the brethren” (Revelation 12:10). Not only does he accuse us before God, but he will also accuse us to one another, endeavoring to create strife and division within the body. His goal is destruction. He does not want to see God’s plans accomplished. **Though others may be against us, God is for us.**

Watch Out Down Under Game

The object of this game is to remain strong as a group, even in the middle of opposition. Try not to let the ball escape out of the circle. You will need one medium size ball (about the size of a soccer ball).

Choose a person to be “it” and have them stand in the middle of the room. Have the rest of the children make a circle around that child. Have them all stand facing outward, with their backs to the person in the middle. They should stand shoulder to shoulder with their hands to their sides and feet spread out evenly. The children’s feet should be touching the foot of the person next to them. The opening between their feet should be large enough for the ball to roll through. The goal is to not let the ball come out of the circle. Here are the rules: once the children in the circle find their position they must stand straight, they cannot move their hands or feet. They can only block with their knees or legs.

The child in the middle will try to get the ball out of the circle, but they can only roll the ball through someone’s legs. They should not toss the ball anywhere else except towards the legs and feet of the children in the circle.

If the ball gets out of the circle, the person that allowed it to come out will then be “it.” After the game, talk about how they had to be on guard against the ball trying to get out. How can we learn about being on guard against spiritual warfare or opposition in our lives?

EZRA 4:17-24

The king sent an answer: To Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, to the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and to the remainder beyond the River: Peace, and so forth.

The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before me.

And I gave the command, and a search has been made, and it was found that this city in former times has revolted against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it.

There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all the region beyond the River; and tax, tribute, and custom were paid to them.

Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me.

Take heed now that you do not fail to do this. Why should damage increase to the hurt of the kings?

Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease.

Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

In response to the letter, the king sent orders to stop the work of rebuilding the city and the temple. Sadly, he did not examine the situation for himself; he just believed the opposition. The king did examine the records about Jerusalem and found that the city had rebelled against the king of Babylon; he, therefore, concluded that “rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it.”

Learning that kings in times past had reigned in Jerusalem to whom all the countries (Jerusalem side of the river) had paid tribute (special taxes), he feared that the people of Judah might once more rebel if ability and opportunity were allowed. He appointed the “accusers” to stop the building of the city immediately until further orders should be given about it. These men then ran with haste to Jerusalem. The builders were served

orders to stop immediately. They were successful in stopping the work, but only for a time, until the second year of the reign of King Darius.

Though at times, it may appear that the enemy has stopped the work of God, he is a defeated foe. We must never be discouraged. Discouragement is a tool of the enemy. Luke 18:1 states, "...men always ought to pray and not lose heart." In Ephesians 6:11 we are admonished, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." In 1 Peter 5:8,9 we are warned, "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith..."

God was faithful to the children of Israel. In time, the temple was complete, despite opposition and setbacks. When the Lord wants something to be accomplished, it is going to happen. When we set out to do God's work, we will encounter opposition just as the people of Israel did. Our adversary, the devil, will be sure of that! Opposition comes in many different forms—people, circumstances, temptations, etc. Yet as a Christian, we have God's assurance of victory over our enemies for "...He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4) and "...If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). **Though others may be against us, God is for us.**

The Decree

We learned in today's lesson that the enemies of God's people wrote a letter to the king to convince him to have the work stopped. It worked! The king made a decree and the work stopped. But, God did not allow the work to stop for good. Despite the enemy's tricks, it would begin again.

Have the children make their own decree that God is for them. You will need parchment paper (one sheet per child) or construction paper, markers, glue, and tongue depressors. For older children, have them use markers to write the following:

THE KING OF KINGS' DECREE

“FOR I KNOW THE THOUGHTS
THAT I THINK TOWARD YOU,
SAYS THE LORD,
THOUGHTS OF PEACE AND NOT OF EVIL,
TO GIVE YOU A FUTURE AND A HOPE.”
JEREMIAH 29:11

You may want to write this out for the younger children, or write one and make copies that can be cut and pasted onto the parchment. After doing this, glue tongue depressors across the top and bottom edge of the paper. With a marker, color the tongue depressors brown. Allow the glue to dry and then roll the paper to look like a scroll. Explain to the children that no matter what the decree is toward us, our heavenly King has decreed that He is for us!

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of thanksgiving that the Lord is for us and is faithful to keep all of His promises. May we turn to the Lord for help whenever we face opposition. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity.

