

Rebuilding the Temple

Lesson Scope: [Ezra chapter 3:8 through 4:24](#)

References in brackets relate to Lesson Scope unless noted otherwise

Lesson Focus

With the altar built, true worship restored, and supplies gathered, the work of rebuilding the temple began in earnest. The leaders gave direction and encouraged the people in the work. They worshiped together as they worked. The younger ones shouted for joy, and the older ones wept for sorrow and joy. The sentiment was one of peace and joy with thanksgiving. God was allowing them to restore a bit of the grandeur that they had once enjoyed. The foundation of the temple was laid.

Still, much work needed to be done, and Satan was not happy to see the building progressing. Up until that point, little opposition had been expressed, even though Israel seemed to have feared that it would. But then the opposition came out in full force. The enemies tried every tactic they could think of to hinder the work. They even hired counsellors to help them connive ways to stop it. Finally, they wrote a letter to the new king, falsely accusing the Jews of insurrection. After a bit of investigation, the king agreed with the opposers and sent a cease-work order. If you have observed a barn raising or something similar, you know that more is accomplished than just building the barn. There is a sense of community. We all work for a common purpose. Building the temple and building the church is much the same. A sense of unity draws us together. The one for whom the work is done is strengthened and encouraged. Working with such a large group of people is not always the most efficient operation. It is important that we are content to do our part and to let others do their part so that the work can progress as efficiently as possible

God's people are called to joyful, diligent effort in building His kingdom. This work must continue in spite of the enemies' efforts to hinder the work.

Lesson Aim: To portray varied responses to God's work among His people.

Theme Verse: [1 Corinthians 15:58](#). Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Lesson Text

Joyful Building

[Ezra 3:8-13](#)^(KJV) Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD. ⁹ Then stood Jeshua *with* his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, *with* their sons and their brethren the Levites. ¹⁰ And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. ¹¹ And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because *he is* good, for his mercy *endureth* for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. ¹² But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, *who were* ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: ¹³ So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

Determined Opposition

[Ezra 4:1-7](#) Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel; ² Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers,

and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye *do*; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither. ³ But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us. ⁴ Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, ⁵ And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. ⁶ And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they *unto him* an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. ⁷ And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter *was* written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue.

Ezra 4:12-17 Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls *thereof*, and joined the foundations. ¹³ Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up *again*, *then* will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and *so* thou shalt damage the revenue of the kings. ¹⁴ Now because we have maintenance from *the king's* palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the king; ¹⁵ That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city *is* a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed. ¹⁶ We certify the king that, if this city be builded *again*, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river. ¹⁷ *Then* sent the king an answer unto Rehum the chancellor, and *to* Shimshai the scribe, and *to* the rest of their companions that dwell in Samaria, and *unto* the rest beyond the river, Peace, and at such a time.

Ezra 4:21 Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until *another* commandment shall be given from me.

Questions for Study

Joyful Building

1. What important role did the leaders fill in rebuilding the temple?
2. Why did the work bring joy? weeping?
3. What effect do good leaders have in making the work progress?
4. What attitudes do the workmen need?

Determined Opposition

5. What prompted the opposition?
6. What tactics did the enemy use?
7. How was the enemy successful? 5
8. How should we respond when the way looks impossible?

Analysing the Passage

Zerubbabel was in line to be king of Judah. After the exile there were no kings established, but he had a place of leadership in Israel.

Jeshua, the high priest, was a grandson of the last high priest before the exile. On every occasion that Zerubbabel is actively engaged Jeshua is also mentioned.

The “ordinance of David king of Israel” (3:10) refers to the assignments he had spelled out for the priests, Levites, singers, and other temple attendees.

The adversaries of Judah were conquered people of other lands who were settled there at the time of exile (4:9-10). According to 2 Kings 17:24-33, these people were instructed in the worship of the God of heaven. They mixed this worship with the worship of their own gods. When they said that they sacrificed to God, it was at least partly true.

The letter to Artaxerxes pointed him to Judah’s past rebellious nature, but failed to mention Cyrus’s command. It was on this partial evidence that the king gave his cease-work order.

Principles and Applications

Joyful Building

1. God’s people unite in promoting God’s work (3:8). God’s people have one common goal in mind: promote His cause. His Spirit helps to guide us to find the place where we can be useful in this great service. As we take that place under the blessing of God, we join a force that cannot be stopped.

2. God's people recognize His goodness and praise Him for His work among them (3:10-11). Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" (Psalm 107:8) Thanksgiving is the result of seeing our weakness and insufficiency in contrast to God's power and total sufficiency. We see God's hand in everyday events.

3. Recognizing that human failure has hindered God's work brings sorrow (3:12). When King David sinned, God forgave him but David's sin gave the enemies of God an opportunity to blaspheme. In some ways it seems David always lived with that sorrow lurking in the background until his death. While the grace and mercy of God offers forgiveness when we express godly sorrow, it is only in the eternal presence of God that the effects of sin will no longer be felt.

4. Great joy accompanies the revival of efforts to promote the work of God (3:12). Whenever God is worshiped in purity and truth, there is joy. Nothing is so satisfying as knowing that you are in His will. This is what Paul and Silas experienced in the jail of Philippi, where they sang unto the Lord. No wonder the Scripture says "The joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

Determined Opposition

5. Those looking on often suggest a working together in spite of differences (4:1:2). Many people consider themselves Christians. It is not our responsibility to judge them. But if we all send our children to school together and we all fellowship together over meals and community projects, we will likely soon be going to church together. Sometimes this means limiting, or even not going to, family gatherings. As much as we would like to think that our influence can help, the pull is usually downward not upward.

6. God's people should see the sacred trust of God's work (4:3). We should not willingly hand our responsibility off to someone else. We should count it our privilege and responsibility to serve. The fact that many conservative people were willing to send their children to public schools during the period from 1850 to 1960 is an example of losing this vision. It cost the church dearly. Let us never again allow the state to educate our children.

7. As God's work progresses, many resort to open opposition (4:4).

When people are excluded who want to be included, their natural reaction is to oppose and resist the work. They often go out of the way to find some abstract or obscure point to stop the work.

8. Those who oppose God slander His work and His people (4:12, 14). Think of Absalom and Shimei against David. Paul was told that he turned the world upside down. Jeremiah was thrown into a dungeon. Peter, Paul, and Silas were put into prison. Those who oppose truth may shade the truth or tell only part of the truth. Occasionally their report is an outright falsehood.

9. “The powers that be” may stand in opposition to the work of God (4:21). We are instructed to obey the laws of men unless they violate God’s law. Sometimes we face things that violate the law of God, such as being called to jury duty or to military service. When we face opposition, let us not give up; our God is able to deliver us.

Important Teachings

1. God’s people unite in promoting God’s work (3:8).
2. God’s people recognize His goodness and praise Him for His work among them (3:10-11).
3. Recognizing that human failure has hindered God’s work brings sorrow (3:12).
4. Great joy accompanies the revival of efforts to promote the work of God (3:12).
5. Those looking on often suggest a working together in spite of differences (4:1-2).
6. God’s people should see the sacred trust of God’s work (4:3).
7. As God’s work progresses, many resort to open opposition (4:4).
8. Those who oppose God slander His work and His people (4:12, 14).
9. “The powers that be” may stand in opposition to the Work of God (4:21).

Answers to Questions

1. What important role did the leaders fill in rebuilding the temple? They gathered the men together; then some were set to building. The priests were set to lead in Worship, and the singers were set to lead in praising and thanking the Lord (3:10-11). It appears that the leaders were not afraid to join in the work.

2. Why did the work bring joy? weeping?

It brought a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment. The people knew that they were obeying God's command. It brought added joy because it was done as unto the Lord. It also produced joy because the people were rebuilding something they had previously enjoyed.

Weeping occurred because the older ones knew that not everything that had been lost could be regained. Mixed emotions erupted because some of them doubted that they would live to see the end product. Some shed tears because they remembered the grandeur of the past. There may also have been tears of joy that this could even be happening.

3. What effect do good leaders have in making the work progress?

They give it organizational structure. They give the effort stability. They capably draw their people into a unified effort. Their example inspires the people to contribute.

4. What attitudes do the workmen need?

They need to be willing to work, willing to accept instruction, and willing to cooperate in the labour with fellow brethren.

5. What prompted the opposition?

Jealousy. The opposition knew the power of God, and they were afraid of what God's people would accomplish if He was with them. They did not want the Jews to gain a foothold again. When God is at work, Satan will always incite opposition.

6'. What tactics did the enemy use?

First, they tried friendliness. They said, "We want to help; we serve the same God." It was an ecumenical approach that would have lowered the Jews and their enemies to the lowest common denominator. Then the enemy jeered and made fun of the Jews' work. Lastly, the enemy wrote a letter to the king, misrepresenting the Jews and slandering them.

7. How was the enemy successful?

Chiefly it was by telling falsehoods to king Artaxerxes. But the Jews also were discouraged easily and allowed themselves to be intimidated. Their hand was weakened, and the work was hindered.

The king casually investigated the matter and decided there was enough proof to halt the work. So Satan won a victory and he stopped the work.

8. How should we respond when the way looks impossible?

We dare not yield to the temptation to give up. We must earnestly seek God's direction and be ready to follow His revealed will. As we will see

in further study of Ezra, the prophets encouraged the people to proceed and after a time they did so with God's blessing. Our ancestors faced persecution and many difficulties, but God provided a land of relative peace. Today we face the challenge of the Internet. We must aggressively limit our exposure, or we will become ensnared. The disciples' question is still relevant: "Who then can be saved?" As is Jesus answer, "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (see Matthew 19:25-26).

Summarizing the Lesson

There is often more than one right response to circumstances. However, some responses are always wrong. Truth demands a response. How we respond to the truth that we know or could know will determine our eternal destiny. To oppose God is a serious matter. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble (James 4:6). Never be ashamed to identify with truth

Research Guide

1. Read accounts from *Martyrs Mirror* of the fierce opposition that the Anabaptists faced during the Reformation era.
2. Read in history about the opposition and difficulties faced by the Mennonites during wartime.