

If You Build It They Will Come Against You

Ezra-Nehemiah

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the fourth chapter of Ezra. I'm so glad to have Dr. Street in town. I look forward to the conference this week. I hope if you haven't signed up yet, please make a point of doing that as soon as possible. I look forward to having Dr. Street preach for us next Sunday morning here at Providence as well. It's a blessing to have this brother come and we have a good draw to get him here in Atlanta, having his grandchildren as hostages. It's a really good way to get him back to preach for us.

But we're in chapter 4 of Ezra, first time we're moving into this chapter. We touched on the very first verse last week briefly relative to understanding what was happening with the people who had remembered the temple before and were discouraged by the fact that the temple was not going to be as glorious. Today we come to chapter 4 of Ezra and we're studying through these two books, Ezra-Nehemiah, expositing them, Lord willing, over the next few months, and we come to the chapter today and the title of the message is "If You Build It They Will Come Against You." I apologize for alluding to a really silly movie from the '80s but the phrase is one that is kind of effective and helpful. If you build it they will come, you know, not for what it meant in the movie but it's true in certain ways. I think I mentioned it even when we were talking about the nursery. You know, if you don't have a nursery, if you don't cover the nursery well, you won't need one. People won't come. But if you build a nursery, if you have a nursery, people will come, and so I think I said that actually a couple of weeks ago with no intention of titling the message this way today but it really does fit the point of the passage.

If you build God's kingdom, they will come and "they" is the enemies of God will come against you. This is essentially the message of this portion and it's really, in a way, the message of the entire book of Ezra-Nehemiah, that as you build God's kingdom, be prepared for opposition. It's not an easy thing to build the kingdom of God in a fallen world. It's not an easy thing to build a life and a heart of holiness by God's grace through the Gospel. It's not an easy thing, it's a fight, and so we see this illustrated for us in the life of the people and it's a very helpful message because we tend to really want things to be easy. We wish we didn't have to fight. It's reasonable that we feel that way but it's just not reality. We're made for a perfect world, we don't live in a perfect world. Jesus is gonna make the world perfect but until he makes it perfect, we must fight and there are going to be times of discouragement and difficulty and that's essentially what this book is

telling us in a really powerful way through the narrative of what happened in the 6th and 5th centuries BC among the people of God as they rebuilt the temple and Jerusalem. So if you build it they will come against you.

Let's read. What we're going to do to this and really interesting thing happening in the book, in this chapter that I need to explain to you, and it's that the first five verses are telling the story of what happened. They're continuing what we've been looking at previously. Remember, the book of Ezra opens with the Cyrus edict and the people of God leaving from the exile in Babylon, Persian area, and going back to Jerusalem and they are commissioned by Cyrus in the providence of God to go back and build the temple and so almost 50,000 Jews go back, make that journey back to the land of Israel, and then they began the work. We saw them rebuild the, first of all the altar in chapter, the beginning of chapter 3, and then they start the temple and build the foundation in chapter, the end of chapter 3, and what we're gonna see is the continuation of the work and the suspension of the work because the work is opposed. So we're following the narrative that started in basically 538-536 is where we are presently, 536 BC, remember BC, we're working down as we go forward, the numbers are getting lower. What we're gonna see in this chapter is the first five verses are continuing the narrative and continuing that story line and in verse 6 a large parenthesis happens, the author puts in this large parenthesis that goes from verse 6 to verse 23. Three quarters of the fourth chapter is a parenthetical insertion. The narrative picks up again in verse 24 so that the narrative, the flow of the story is verses 1 to 5 and verse 24.

Now and for us, it's a little confusing because basically we're not used to these names. This is the problem. We're gonna, we run into in verse 6 a new name, Ahasuerus. I had to practice that and that's the best I could do after practicing pronouncing that name. Artaxerxes. And they're not familiar names to us. The original audience of the book of Ezra that received this book probably around 430-420 BC, those names were familiar to them so that when the author mentions in verse 6, "in the reign of Ahasuerus," I shouldn't have even pointed that out, I think I might have psyched myself out. But anyway, this is the king, when he used that name, the people reading the book of Ezra for the first time knew exactly who he was talking about. They knew that he was talking about the king of the Persian empire that reigned from 486-465 BC, the same king who reigned during the story of the book of Esther, the story of Esther, remember when the Jews are almost murdered through the plot of Haman. This king is the one they're talking about so when they hear the name, they immediately know that but when you're reading Ezra, it's very easy if you were reading through the book as preparing for, you know, to hear it preached, you might have totally missed the fact that they're jumping around in time because these names aren't familiar.

And Artaxerxes, so verse 6 covers a king that reigned, it's probably talking about events about 480 BC. So it jumped ahead from 536 to 480 BC and then verses 7 to 23 refer to Artaxerxes who reigned from 465-424. He's the king right now that when these people are receiving this letter, he's the king that sent Ezra back to teach the law of God. He's the king that Nehemiah, the cup-bearer, went to and said, "Please let me go back." Well, the people that are receiving the book of Ezra, they understand, Ahu, Ah, whatever, A, A-h

and A-x, you know, Artaxerxes and Ahasuerus, golly. Alright. We really will have to... pray for me, I can't believe I can't pronounce that.

Anyway, but when they heard it, it was like this, imagine that I was telling you, I'm trying to convince you that America has only gone to war when we were attacked. Don't argue the premise but essentially I think that is true myself, but that's really not the point. And I tell you, "Listen, WWI, we went into WWI because the Germans were aggressive toward us." I'm telling you about the sinking of many of our ships by the U-boats and then the letter, I tell you about something, a letter that was written by the German Foreign Minister to Mexico asking Mexico to attack America if we declared war on Germany, and making plans to support them. This is true. They did this. When Americans found out about that, that enraged Americans to the point that they were ready now to get involved in the war and they declared war. Okay, so we didn't really go over there to be aggressive, we kind of felt like we were being the victims of aggression so started the war.

So I'm telling you that about America and I say, "You know, when FDR was President, the Japanese attacked us." That's essentially what happens in verse 6. He changes focus from the narrative because I'm really talking to you about WWI, I'm gonna tell you about the narrative of WWI but I interject when FDR was President. That's what A-h would be like for you and me. If you have any sense of history, then you know that. "FDR, oh, he was the President during WWII when the Japanese attacked us." Then if I say, "And then we were attacked during the presidency of George W. Bush when the Twin Towers were attacked," and I spend 16 verses talking to you about that and I'm showing you and I'm illustrating, "Look, we've been the victims of aggression against us and we've responded to that aggression," and I'm teaching you through these different illustrations one basic point. Essentially what the author of Ezra is doing is just that. He's saying, "Look, I want to talk to you," and he's talking to them, interestingly enough, about something that happened for the readers about 105 years before. If they're receiving this in 430 BC, he's talking about the events that happened in 536 BC, 105 years. Kind of like us when Woodrow Wilson was President and they found out about the German letter to Mexico. Do you see? And then he brings up to 480 BC when A-h is the king and he says, "This is what happened when he was the king, they sent a letter against, accusing Judah against the Persian king." That would be like bringing up FDR. And then finally the attack on 9/11 would be like bringing up Artaxerxes who is the king they can most clearly identify with.

So for them, this was much clearer than it is for you and me. So you just have to kind of take that and this is why it's important when you read your Bible to read it in context and sometimes to have, you know, a good study Bible that explains the history because the Bible is meant to be taken in context of what was actually written at the time. So with that in mind, what we see, then, is that the message is essentially this: if you try to build the kingdom of God, if you try to build the temple and build Jerusalem, which is what Ezra-Nehemiah is all about, at that point in time God's kingdom was being built, as they built the temple, as they reintroduced the law under the return of Ezra, as they built the walls under Nehemiah, they were building God's kingdom and giving glory to the one true God, and what he's basically teaching them is, "Listen, at every point along the way,

they experienced intense opposition. There was nothing easy about the work." And therefore it is God's way to build his kingdom through weak people who will be opposed and who will know their weakness but who will trust in him and set to the work in spite of the difficulty. That's essentially the message of this chapter. If you build it they will come against you, so are you going to build it or not?

So let's read verses, we'll read the entire chapter and watch how this happens, these, the big parenthesis starting at verse 6. Ezra 4:1,

1 Now when the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the people of the exile were building a temple to the LORD God of Israel, 2 they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' households, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we, like you, seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here." 3 But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of fathers' households of Israel said to them, "You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God; but we ourselves will together build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us." 4 Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building, 5 and hired counselors against them to frustrate their counsel all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. 6 Now in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. 7 And in the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of his colleagues wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the text of the letter was written in Aramaic and translated from Aramaic. 8 Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes, as follows-- 9 then wrote Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe and the rest of their colleagues, the judges and the lesser governors, the officials, the secretaries, the men of Erech, the Babylonians, the men of Susa, that is, the Elamites, 10 and the rest of the nations which the great and honorable Osnappar deported and settled in the city of Samaria, and in the rest of the region beyond the River. Now 11 this is the copy of the letter which they sent to him: "To King Artaxerxes [this is the letter from the enemies of the Lord]: Your servants, the men in the region beyond the River, and now 12 let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem; they are rebuilding the rebellious and evil city and are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations [they're talking about the rebuilding of Jerusalem]. 13 "Now let it be known to the king, that if that city is rebuilt and the walls are finished, they will not pay tribute, custom or toll, and it will damage the revenue of the kings. 14 Now because we are in the service of the palace, and it is not fitting for us to see the king's dishonor, therefore we have sent and informed the king, 15 so that a search may be made in the record books of your fathers. And you will discover in the

record books and learn that that city is a rebellious city and damaging to kings and provinces, and that they have incited revolt within it in past days; therefore that city was laid waste. 16 We inform the king that if that city is rebuilt and the walls finished, as a result you will have no possession in the province beyond the River."

It's an astounding letter actually. They're writing, now this happening, I think, probably about 446 BC right before Nehemiah makes his appeal. This is after, I think, this letter we just read is after Ezra comes back, starts reforms, the people are motivated by the law of God, start building Jerusalem and these people are gonna stop with everything they can. We'll talk more about this next week. They start rebuilding the city and they send this letter and they basically, it's so underhanded, conniving, "We're really on your side, O King, and we want to protect you," and it acts like the nation of Judah is really able to revolt and take control of everything this side of the Euphrates River, which is ridiculous. But this is the kind of evil opposition that the people faced. Now verse 17, the king sends an answer and he listens to them temporarily.

17 Then the king sent an answer to Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their colleagues who live in Samaria and in the rest of the provinces beyond the River [and here's his answer, the king's answer]: "Peace. And now 18 the document which you sent to us has been translated and read before me. 19 A decree has been issued by me, and a search has been made and it has been discovered that that city has risen up against the kings in past days, that rebellion and revolt have been perpetrated in it, 20 that mighty kings have ruled over Jerusalem, governing all the provinces beyond the River, and that tribute, custom and toll were paid to them. 21 So, now issue a decree to make these men stop work, that this city may not be rebuilt until a decree is issued by me. 22 Beware of being negligent in carrying out this matter; why should damage increase to the detriment of the kings?"

He basically agrees with their letter with his initial inquiry. He agrees with their letter, "Yeah, it's true, you know, I've read about David and Solomon and the greatness of the kingdom and I read about their revolting against Nebuchadnezzar and so stop the work." Verse 23, they receive the letter back,

23 Then as soon as the copy of King Artaxerxes' document was read before Rehum and Shimshai the scribe and their colleagues, they went in haste to Jerusalem to the Jews and stopped them by force of arms.

They go and stop the work by force of arms. This is what I think then leads up to Nehemiah mourning when he gets word about this stoppage of the work here. He hears about the gates being smashed and burned. They didn't just stop the work, they vented on the city of Jerusalem and then that leads to Nehemiah risking his life by asking Artaxerxes to change his mind about something he just did. Now what's interesting about

it is when I start telling you this story, I want to jump ahead to Nehemiah 1 and start talking about that, and I think the people reading it would have felt something of the same thing. So why does the Lord do this? He's just wanting us at this point to see, "Look, opposition came again and again and again. Be prepared for opposition. Now we've got to go back and talk about the temple because that's where we are in the story. That's the narrative and that jumps back in verse 24 to the narrative that we were talking about in verses 1 to 5.

24 Then work on the house of God in Jerusalem ceased, and it was stopped until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

The work on house of God, do you see verse 24? The work that was stopped in verse 23 was the work that was talked about in verse 12 of chapter 4, that is the rebuilding of the walls and the finishing the walls and repairing the foundations. That's what was stopped in verse 23, so that's that big parenthesis. Anyway, I know it's a lot to process but let's get back to the main point.

So the narrative is verses 1 to 5 and verse 24. The enemies of Judah hear that the people are rebuilding the temple. Remember, the cry went out, it was so loud, the cry of rejoicing and mourning that mingled together and went out? It was so loud that people heard it many miles away. The sound was heard far away, verse 13 of chapter 3. And then I mentioned to you last time the first word in Hebrew in chapter 4 is "they heard." In the order of the Hebrew text, the emphasis is on hearing what? They heard the cry and the enemies have heard now that that cry, that loud shout, was about the building of the temple.

So what I want to do this morning is organize our thoughts around three points and the first point that we're gonna look at is the narrative. I want us just to watch the flow of the narrative and then I'm gonna briefly touch on the parenthesis which I've already kind of told you but I'm gonna remind you about it, that's point 2. The narrative; number 2, the parenthesis; number 3, the point of the passage. Okay? And the implications of the point of the passage.

So the narrative, verses 1 to 5 and verse 24. We're looking now at the people hear about the building and what happens next, and what I want to do under the narrative is divide this under four points, four subpoints, so 1A, B, C, D.

The first thing we see is that when they hear, help is offered, verses 1 and 2, "when the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the people of the exile were building a temple to the LORD God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' households, and said to them, 'Let us build with you, for we, like you, seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here.'" The author quotes there, gives them a lot of time in what they said to Zerubbabel and the heads of the people of Judah, and at first glance if it wasn't for the word, a very important word in verse 1, we would be, as you're reading this for the first time and even if you, you might have read over the word in verse 1 and might be

thinking, "This is really amazing. What a great turn of events. They're offering help. Look how God is moving." But there's a key word in verse 1, what is that word? The enemies of Judah. The inspired author tells us that the people that are making this offer are the enemies of the people of God.

So help is offered, question mark? Is it really help that is offered? Perhaps the people, many of the people think they're helping, I don't doubt that, but as God sees it, what is happening? It's not really help. But I can see how it would have been tempting if you were Zerubbabel and the people of Judah and you've got this incredible task to build the temple, it's gonna cost a lot of money, it's gonna take a lot of work. You need a lot of people. You need a lot of carpenters. You need a lot of masons. You need a lot of people that know how to work with metal. You need a lot of go-fers. You need a lot of people to pick things up and move them around and to have more workers. Is that not better? Yeah, and you need money. "You guys want to help us, you want to give an offering?" It would have been very tempting for them to say, "Yes."

So the help is offered. That's the first subpoint and the second subpoint, B under the narrative, compromise is rejected. Compromise is rejected. This wasn't really help. We don't know the hearts of the people, there may have been some people who genuinely wanted to help, but what God sees it would have been a compromise in a massive way of what he had called them to do, and the fact that they weren't really friends, it looks like they're friends, doesn't it, except for that word in verse 1, enemies, it looks like at first glance they're friends.

But their true colors, in fact the third point, C, is their true colors are revealed verses 4 and 5. Though the appeal looked attractive, it was compromise and part of how you see it is their true colors are revealed immediately. As soon as they say no, what do the people of the land do? If they really wanted to help and they're just told they can't, well, you would think they would just go and they'd just watch and maybe if their hearts were really pure, they would want to, "Hey, what do we have to do to be Jews? Can we convert to Judaism? We need to be baptized, to be circumcised. Yes, we will do it. We want to follow Yahweh, the true God, the one true God." If that was their hearts, they could've done that and they would've been accepted. That was something that was happening again and again throughout the Old Testament. There is example after example: Rahab, Ruth, the people when they left Egypt, there were people that came with that were of the nations that came and followed Yahweh.

That's clearly not their heart and it's seen by their true colors shining through because what happens when they're told no. The people of the land oppose the work, vigorously and vehemently oppose the work. In fact, there are three participles in verses 4 and 5 that illustrate their opposition. In the New American Standard which I'm reading, you have the word, first of all, the people of the land discouraged; and secondly, they frightened; and third, they hired, they hired counselors.

So their true colors show through in the sense that they are determined to oppose the work. You know, often this same kind of thing has happened throughout history and will

happen in your life in various ways. Those who do not love God, there's only two camps, you either love God or you hate God. The Bible says we come into this world hating God, all of us. We're the enemies of God. Romans 8:7 says the natural man is at enmity with God. The mind set on the flesh is at enmity with God for it does not submit to the law of God nor indeed can it. Colossians 1 says that when we were practicing evil deeds, we had enmity in our heart against God. So the reality is that all of us come into this world wanting to live our lives, and the reason we have enmity with God is because God makes an absolute claim to authority over our lives and it is indigenous to sinful humanity that we want to rule our own lives, we don't want God to rule over us. And even when people talk about the fact that they might say, "I love Jesus and you love Jesus," and they use the name Jesus but they don't mean the Jesus who says, "You must deny yourself, take up your cross if you want to follow Me." They're not talking about that Jesus. They're talking about a Jesus they've made up in their own minds or that they've heard someone else has made up for them. You see, what sinners hate is to be told, "You must bow the knee. You must submit." It's evident even as little babies. A little child doesn't want to obey, you don't have to teach a child. It's not like they have to get socialized to know how to disobey. They don't have to get socialized to know how to, in a sense, want to shake their fists. It's not like they really shake their fist, but I mean their little hearts, it's amazing how harsh and angry they can sound. You don't give them what they want.

We were actually driving yesterday through a parking lot and saw a little girl, now she wasn't a baby, this was like a 7 or 8-year-old little girl, and she was walking ahead of her parents and she was like, Patti commented, "Look how she's really making time." She was just walking, walking, walking, and she turned around like this and we saw her face, looking at her parents, she glared at them, I mean, like this little girl was angry. They had told her something she didn't want to hear. You see, because every human being wants to be the master of their fate and the captain of their soul, and the one thing they hate is when someone says, "You are not the master of your fate. You are not the captain of your soul. You must worship God and obey him."

So these people came saying, "We want to worship God," but they didn't mean in that way because the God of the Bible makes an exclusive claim. You see, our sin, it is so utterly offensive that we want to live like this. He's made us. He's good in every way. He's blessed us with every blessing. He's poured out his kindness upon us in myriad ways and sin is heinous and evil and it's ugly and it's in us, all of us. And when you come to know the living God, when he causes you to be born again, when he takes out the heart of stone and puts in a heart of flesh and he grants you repentance so that you see that your biggest problem is not what someone else has done to you or something that has happened to you, your biggest problem, my biggest problem is my evil sinful heart. When you see that and you are granted repentance and you now see that Jesus Christ is your only hope and you place your faith in him, then what happens is you've been translated from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's beloved Son. You have gone from darkness to light. You are in his kingdom. You used to be in the kingdom of the devil. Jesus speaking to the Jews said to the Jews, he said, "You are of your father the devil." Everyone comes into this world as a child of Satan. Sin wants to be like God,

wants to rule. That's Satan's essence. He wanted to be like the Most High. And so sin is the reproduction of that heart through Adam and Eve and through all of us.

So these people who feign and who maybe in their minds think they want to help, they're thinking something like this, "Hey, we'd like to build your temple. We have been," probably many of them were sacrificing to God. They probably were offering sacrifices on the high places and different places to Yahweh as they also offered sacrifices to all the other gods that they worshiped. You see, they had been brought here by Esarhaddon and by other Assyrian kings and they had the gods of their own lands and they thought it's just prudent and wise in a pluralistic culture to cover all your bases, and so, "Yeah, we worship Yahweh too." They were syncretistic. The culture in that day was pluralistic, many ways to God and all of them valid; many gods, all of them valid, "Hey, it's okay that you worship whatever god you do. I worship whatever god I do. Just don't tell me I have to worship your God."

It's exactly the same way today, isn't it? I read a quote, somebody said, you know, relativism, they're talking about tolerance, I was reading an article on tolerance this week. Tolerance is actually a distinctly Christian virtue. It has arisen, now I'm telling you tolerance as tolerance really is, not as it's understood to be in the culture. There's a chasm between what tolerance is and how it's understood today. True tolerance came out of Christian cultures where people had come to understand the true and living God and understood that all people have dignity according to the word and that we should not oppress people who differ with us religiously, and true tolerance says, "I disagree with you." Listen to this, "I disagree with you but I'm okay with the fact that you hold an opinion. I'm not gonna try to oppress you. I disagree with you but I care about you. I respect you." That's tolerance. Today tolerance is the deceptive lie of what tolerance is, is actually pluralism; that tolerance today masquerades itself as saying, "I have my version of truth, you have your version of truth, he has his version of truth, she has her version of truth, and all are equally valid and the only thing we won't tolerate is someone saying there's only one way." And this actually the quote I read was, "The most intolerant thought philosophy in history is relativism or pluralism." Relativism, truth is relative to you. Whatever you say is true, is true for you. People who believe that are not tolerant of people who say, "God has spoken and truth is absolute. It's not my truth and your truth, it's God's truth." And that's the one thing the world can't abide now.

This is why, I mean, we believe the Bible teaches the authority of Scripture; that this book is the one book that God has spoken in. He's spoken in nature but the one book, the one place he's written anything down is the Bible, the 66 books of the Bible, and the Bible is inerrant and inspired and it speaks with authority. Everything it speaks on, it speaks with absolute authority. It doesn't matter what I think or what I want, God knows best. We believe in the authority of Scripture, we also believe in the exclusivity of Christ or the exclusivity of the Gospel, that there is only one way to heaven. Jesus himself said this when he said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father but by Me."

So we make exclusive claims, authoritative claims. We make them with kindness. We make them in saying, "Listen, I'm a sinner just like you are and there are things that I wish were different than what God says, but I've learned that God's way is best and whatever is in my heart I don't trust." And so we say it, that's true humility. We know we're sinners. We're no better than anyone else. It's only the grace of God that is our hope, but God has said this is the way to live, bow the knee to Jesus Christ and follow my word. Now when you have that position, you will have people who will come to you and say, "Let us build together," but you need to be sure before you build with them that they're really on our team.

Now what does that look like today? Well, one really practical application is for marriage. You know, if you're gonna marry someone, you're gonna build a life for the glory of God, what does this say? You don't just take someone's word for it, that they want to build with you. "Yes, we worship God." You want to look for fruit of a person who is truly devoted to Jesus Christ and if they're not, you should follow what the Scripture shows right here, this is a model for us, Zerubbabel says, "Listen, you have nothing in common with us. You don't really share with us the same values and the same worship. We wish that you did but you don't." This is why the Scripture is so clear about believers marrying believers. I mean, if you're married to an unbeliever that's where you are and God will use you to reach them, or he can use you to reach them if you'll walk with him. But you don't enter into marriage as a believer with an unbeliever.

This also says things like partnerships in various ways. One of the things that is challenging at times is, you know, we have partnerships in society culturally with folks of different faiths who we agree with about certain things, and we should be kind to them and we should work together with them. An example is people who oppose abortion. Roman Catholics historically have been very strong in opposing abortion and I'm thankful for that. We ought to be thankful for that, but there's a difference between being able to work side by side in certain areas and being true allies.

I remember reading Douglas Wilson used the term co-belligerent versus an ally in one of his books. He speaks of that when it comes to certain issues, we have to see ourselves as co-belligerents, not allies, and he used the analogy from WWII. He said the United States and the Russians, the Soviet Union, were co-belligerents in WWII, they were not allies. We were allied with France and Britain but we were co-belligerent with Russia. Why is that? Because Russia was a tyrannical regime too. Soviet communism was not something we could ally with. It's a godless thing and America was not at that place. America is a democracy or a democratic republic, and so we were allied with France and with England and we need to remember that. And after the war, we saw how quickly that became evident that we weren't on the same page as they were as the Iron Curtain descended over Europe. They were just as tyrannical as the Nazis were but during the war to fight to stop the Nazis, it was profitable to work with them. They were already fighting them anyway so we weren't going to fight against them too. So we're co-belligerents.

Now the true colors revealed, back to the narrative, I want us to look at how they opposed the work. This is actually the narrative point D. We said the help is offered, compromise

is rejected, true colors are revealed, D, the opposition is described. Look at how the opposition is described in verses 4 and 5. I mentioned those three participles, they discouraged the people of Judah, they frightened them, they hired counselors. This was a well thought out program of opposition. And the word "discouraged" here actually in the Hebrew it means the hands, weaken the hands. They weakened the hands of the people and the idea of that word "weaken" is like to drop by the side. It's like you're carrying something and you drop it or you're shouldering a burden and you just finally quit. Their goal, they wanted to dishearten the people, discourage them from the work. So they did everything they could to dishearten them, to say, "It's not worth it. Why are you doing this? It's impossible. You can't make this happen."

Not only did they try to discourage them but, secondly, they frightened them, these three things under the opposition, the form of the opposition. They frightened and they intimidated them and we see this illustrated when we look at Nehemiah and what was happening there. They were actually threatening them with violence, this apparently happening here because they were literally frightened from building. Now they had an edict at this point in time from Cyrus saying to build but the people were so opposed to them that they were frightening them and Cyrus is a long way away and government in a fallen world can be very fickle in its support.

They also hired counselors against them. The ESV and NIV say they bribed counselors against them. Apparently they bribed officials. They were lining the pockets of officials to make things hard for them. It wasn't just that they were personally trying to discourage them, they were personally threatening them, they were actually working behind the scenes to do everything they could to stop the work and their goal is seen in another word in verse 5, to frustrate their counsel. This is really the goal of all they've been doing. They want to bring to an end, they want to bring to nothing the work that God has called the people to.

Now that's the narrative. They're opposing it with all they have and the people are encountering the opposition and then verse 24 tells us their work is effective. I mean, the work that they're doing to stop the work of the house of God is effective. The work ceases and for 16 years the temple work lies dormant from 536 to 520.

Now then you have the parenthesis. So the second point this morning, the parenthesis, and we're gonna talk more about this next time but just to remind us again why he takes all this time with the parenthesis and he mentions these two different events, one in verse 6 from the time of Esther basically, and then the second event in verses 7 to 23 from the time about 15-16 years before he writes the final copy of Ezra-Nehemiah, and in both places you have in verse 6, "Now in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem." There's some kind of accusation, some kind of slanderous report is sent and he sums it up in one verse. It went, and he doesn't go into more detail. We might speculate it might have helped to grease the skids for the work of Haman later. We don't know, but there's not more report. Basically he's telling them they slandered them during that time, so it's like they slandered him during the time of FDR and now he says in verse 7, "in the days of

Artaxerxes," the same thing happened and now he gives us the full account, blow by blow, and he gives us the text of what was written. He says, "Look at this malicious, conniving letter." This is kind of what the author is trying to say to us, "Look at these deceitful, despicable opponents of God. They'll stoop to any level. There's nothing they won't stoop to." So he brings those parentheses in because they added force to his basic point he's making in the narrative. The parenthesis is there because God wants the parenthesis there and the parenthesis says, "Man, opposition was intense throughout the process."

Now the implication. So the first point was the narrative, the second point was the parenthesis, and now the implications. If you build you will be opposed. If you build God's kingdom it will be a fight. That's the thrust. Now what does that mean to you and me today? It doesn't mean if we build a new building out front we're gonna be opposed, people are gonna be up here trying to stop us from the work. You know, the carpenters are gonna be doing stuff, people are gonna be coming and sawing things down as we do. No, that's not what we're talking about. We're not talking about a physical building. At this point in time, they were talking about the importance of a physical building because that was the place at that point in redemptive history where God actually met with people through sacrifices, the temple was pivotal to God's purposes. But now it's not about buildings.

What is the temple today? The temple was fulfilled in Jesus. When he came to the earth, he was the temple. "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it," he says in John 2. He was speaking of the temple of his body. God's glory dwelt in the person of Jesus and Jesus is the one place you must go to meet God. In the same way the temple that they were building in Ezra's day was the one place you had to go to meet God, Jesus is the one place you have to go to meet God. And when Jesus fulfills the temple and dies for his people and brings us to God by offering his blood on the altar, the true altar in heaven, then he begins to build his people who now become the temple, and his people now become Jerusalem. Revelation 21, a new Jerusalem comes down out of heaven and the Jerusalem is the people of God. So Jerusalem typifies the people of God. The temple now typifies the people of God. And so what he's talking about is when you and I are building God's kingdom by building his people, we will be opposed. If you build it they will come against you.

Now think about how this applies. I mean, the Scripture speaks of our bodies individually as temple of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 6:19, the Apostle Paul speaking to the Corinthians says, "You realize that your body," when he's talking about a man who would give himself to immorality with a prostitute, he says, "Do you realize you're joining the members of Christ to a harlot?" And he says, "Do you not understand your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God and you are not your own for you were bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body." So individually there's a sense in which we are the temple and so that when you build your own soul, when you're preparing your heart, when you're purifying your life, when you're fighting for holiness in your life, you are building the temple in a sense, the same way that they were, and if you're doing that, if you're really going at that, you will know you

will be opposed. The enemies of God will come against you. It is not going to be easy. It's gonna be a fight. It's not gonna be a, you know, a cakewalk to holiness. It is a fight. Dr. Mack has a book, speaking about the struggle with sin, it's "A Fight to the Death." It is that kind of fight.

So if you want to be holy and God motivates you and you find yourself like the people in Ezra that we're reading about, when they were called out of exile, they're called back to the land of Israel and they're so excited, look, remember they see what God is doing, "God has given us all that we need. We have priests. We have Levites. We have singers. We have builders to build the temple. We have money. God has kept all the instruments of the temple safe for us and we have money given from the treasury and special offerings from people around us given to us. Look at that." And they come back to the land to start building with wind in their sails, enthusiasm, great expectations, and what we see happen is God grants that grace to start the work but don't expect it to be a smooth sailing prospect. Take that momentum you have and gird your loins for action because the fight is coming.

So when the Lord works in your heart and you are burdened and you want to seek after purity in a new way, to seek after holiness in a new way, to fight against sin, and you feel that sense because of repentance that God has granted to you and faith that he's granted to you and new joy in Christ, when you go expect it's gonna be hard and the moments when it's not hard, just rejoice in that but be ready for the fact it's going to be hard and set your mind to the work. But it's not just about us as individuals, we're building his kingdom corporately. One of the favorite images in the New Testament is the church is the temple of God. You see that in Ephesians 2, 1 Peter 2, 1 Corinthians 3:16 where Paul says, "You," this is you plural, "You are the temple of God and if any man does damage to the temple of God, God will deal with him," is essentially the message in 1 Corinthians 3:16. So we're the temple. So when you're building in someone else, when you're investing your life in ministering to someone else, expect opposition. There's gonna be a battle.

Now what is our opposition? It's not that so much we don't struggle, we don't wrestle with flesh and blood, our opposition is the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world system is always opposed to everything that we want to do. Every day that we seek God, we fight against the value system that is continually being presented to us, hammered home to us, and you have to fight against that. That's the world. The flesh is our own sin nature, the residue of sin in our hearts that still reacts to the law of God. We find in ourselves things resisting God and that's why we're called as Christians to crucify the flesh by looking to Christ. So you fight against the flesh and then we have a very real enemy, Satan himself, who seeks to destroy us. He hates God and he hates those who belong to God and as long as we're in this world, we're gonna have to fight.

You know, it's not a happy message and it's one that I think people throughout history have struggled with this in a secular version of this. You know, people who want to say, "Why can't we just all get along? Let's all bury all our missiles, get rid of them. We don't need armies. Let's just not fight anymore." It's kind of a plank sometimes of certain political philosophy. The reality is you can't do that. If you get rid of all your missiles,

you get rid of all your armies, you get rid of everything, then you will have people oppress you and rule over you.

The whole point I was making earlier about the WWI, WWII, America getting attacked, now think about it. We didn't go looking to go fight in WWI. We weren't just saying, "Hey, we've got to get some, do some fighting so we can kill some people." It wasn't that way in WWII either. The Japanese attacked us unprovoked. 9/11.

So in a fallen world, you're gonna have war and the wise thing is to be strong and ready for it and to be righteous as you can in your purposes. Well, in the Christian life, we're gonna have war. You can't escape the fact that every day you wake up, your flesh wakes up with you. Every day you wake up, the world system is against you and against Christ. Every day you wake up, you have an adversary, the devil, who is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, therefore as 1 Peter 1:13 says, gird your minds for action. Get up ready to fight and we need to help each other in the fight. That's what God is calling us to do.

Let's go to him in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for Your word that You have spoken to us. You've given us a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. We thank You most of all for the Lord Jesus Christ who is at the heart and center of everything that You've revealed to us in Scripture; that You have made a way for sinners to be made right with You through the sacrifice of Your own Son. We were at war with You and You were angry with us, and yet You have made peace through the blood of the cross. Jesus Christ took in Himself the hostility, the wrath, and He brings us into favor with You when we repent and place our faith in Him and now we've become the children of God. Now there is no more war with You, there is only peace and joy and love and harmony. But Lord, in reality when we come to be Your children, we find that we have new enemies. The enemies that hate You, hate us and we pray that You would help us to be faithful, to cling to You, to walk in the power of Your Spirit, to walk in Your truth, and to gird our minds for action, to be faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ who with hearts of love wield the weapon that we have which is the Gospel. We only want to bless our enemies, our human enemies, by preaching Jesus Christ to them and seeing them come to saving faith and to true joy. Father, help us be more faithful to the work. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.