

## Lesson 7 Facing Opposition

### Key Themes in the Book of Ezra

- Yahweh's covenantal faithfulness and man's covenantal unfaithfulness
- Yahweh sovereignly and providentially works out his redemptive purpose in history despite human evil.
- Yahweh's intention for Israel for purity in worship and obedience to the law
- Yahweh's grace and mercy exceed his anger
- Sinful man's need for a changed heart

### Background

**Temple :** the temple in Jerusalem was the place where Yahweh dwelled and the place He chose to meet with His people. His people went there for forgiveness of their sins and to express their thankfulness for His goodness to them. It was also a place of corporate celebration where all Israel gathered three times a years for the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

**Assyria and Esarhaddon, King of Assyria:** Assyria was a large empire during the Old Testament period of the Israelite kings. In 722 BC the Assyrians attacked the northern tribes of Israel and sent most of the Jews from Samaria into exile. A later king of Assyria, Esarhaddon, who was also known as Osnappar repopulated Samaria with Assyrians. These Assyrians intermarried with the few Jews who had remained there. They also brought brought their own pagan religion with them. They were pantheistic and worshiped up to 1,000 gods. Their descendents still lived in Samaria when the exiles led by Zerubbabel returned from Babylon.

### Key Words and phrases:

**to discourage: Strong's H7503 "raphah"** The literal meaning is to "weaken the hands". In Hebrew it is a verb with a broad meaning. It could mean to become slack, to relax, to cease, to become discouraged, to become disheartened, to become weak, to become feeble, or to let go. The grammar associated with this word in Ezra 4:4 implies the meaning of enfeebling or disheartening thereby "weakening the hands "of the builders.

**to frustrate: Strong's H6565 "parar"** A verb meaning to break, to divide, to frustrate. This word is often used to refer to the frustration of plans.

**Read Ezra 4:1-5 and 2 Kings 17:24-41** (If possible read these passages also in The Message Bible Translation))

The work on the temple was going forward under the direction of Zerubbabel, the governor, Jeshua the priest and the heads of father's households. It did not take long before they encountered opposition.

1. According to Ezra 4:1-2 who approached Israel's leaders? What did they ask of the leaders? What was the reason they gave for their request?

2. What can you learn about the religious practices of the people that populated Samaria, the land north of Judah? See 2 Kings 17:24-41 Was the enemy telling the truth to Zerubbabel and the leaders about their religious practices? What do you think their real motive and agenda was? What psychological ploy is being used here against Israel?

3. What reply was given to the enemy by Israel's leaders in 4:3? Why did Zerubbabel and the other leaders respond the way they did? Also see Ezra 3:2. What do you think would have happened if they allowed the enemy to work with them?

4. When the enemy's offer was rejected by Israel's leaders what other 3 tactics did the enemy attempt to employ according to Ezra 4:5-6? King Cyrus reigned 29 years (559 -530BC). What do you think the impact of such a protracted opposition was?

**Application:** When we serve the Lord and strive to obediently walk with Him, we will often find ourselves under attack by Satan who employs these same kind of tactics as well as others against us. What are some of the best ways to overcome spiritual attack and persevere? What do the following Scriptures teach us about the key to overcoming evil, challenges, hardships and tough times?

**1 Peter 5: 6-10**

**James 4:7**

**Hebrews 12:1-3**

According to Revelation chapters 2 and 3 what does Christ promise to those who "overcome" and remain faithful to Him in the midst of life's trials and pressures?

