

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 1lb. 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 1lb. bag of unshelled peanuts, two paper bags and masking tape. In our lesson today, we will be learning that 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 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 then 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. So we can learn also that God will help us as well. If you would like, 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 grow in the Lord? Just as you begin a good work for the Lord, obstacles may appear everywhere you turn. In this chapter we will see that the good work of rebuilding the temple had no sooner begun than it was met with opposition from the individuals who hated God’s people.

We can learn from the children of Israel and from our Bible lesson today how the Lord would have us deal with opposition. The Lord has a work for all of His people to do. But our enemy, the devil, wants to stop God’s work as best he can. We need to remember that God is on our side and will help us to stand up against any and all opposition. **God is for us even when others are against us.**

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.

In the verses before this chapter, the people were rejoicing as the foundation of the temple was laid. Now adversaries or opponents of the Jews tried to prevent the building of the temple. They came to Zerubbabel and to the chiefs of the people wanting to join them in the work.

On the surface, what they were doing seemed liked a good thing, but Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the chiefs would not allow them to help for several reasons. These adversaries were the descendants of the old nation of Israel (the northern ten tribes taken into captivity by Assyria long before Babylon conquered Judah). They had married foreigners and began to worship their

gods. They were a mixed multitude, not truly Jews after God's heart. It was dangerous to have them there because they 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.

As Christians, 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." That is exactly what happened in verse 4 - "The people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building." To weaken the hands of the people means to deprive them of strength and courage and to discourage them in their work. After they weren't allowed to join in, they hired counselors to come against them and frustrate their efforts. They caused problems for the remaining five years of King Cyrus' reign until the second year of the reign of Darius, fourteen years in all.

We see the importance of separating ourselves from the world. Second Corinthians 6:14-18 tells us, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what concord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has he that believes with an infidel? 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 in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.' Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.'"

We are to be a light to this world, but that never means that we join ourselves to this world. We are a "called out," "separate" people. Sometimes the world may want to join with us in some work the Lord would have us to do. But we have to pray for great wisdom from the Lord so our hearts can be guarded against this. We will

often find that when we refuse to join with the world, the world will turn against us as Judah's enemies turned against them. **God is for us even when others are against us.**

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.

Now we see that an accusation is being sent to the king against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. This accusation is being sent from the opposition. We must remember that “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. That is what happened here as they wrote a letter to the king, which misrepresented what was going on with the temple.

In verse 11, they represent themselves as very loyal to the king and very concerned for him. Then they represent the Jews as being disloyal to the king and a danger to the government of the king, that Jerusalem was a “rebellious and bad city” (v. 12). After throwing suspicion on the Jews as a defiant people, their accusers bring the accusation, already raised at the beginning of the letter to a climax, by saying that if Jerusalem is rebuilt the king will lose his rule over the lands on this side of the river.

Their information as to the status of the building was incorrect, for the Jews had only begun to build the temple, which Cyrus had commanded them to do. As for the walls, there was no work done on them. **God is for us even when others are against 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 can’t 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.

The king sends his orders in answer to the information that was sent to him by the Samaritans against the Jews. Remember that he did not examine the situation for himself, but only believed the opposition. The king did examine the records about Jerusalem, and found that it had rebelled against the king of Babylon and therefore it was as they called it a “bad city.”

The king also learned that in times past other kings had reigned there to whom all the countries on that side of the river had paid tribute (special taxes) to, thus he felt there was the danger that if they were ever able to, they would rebel and stop paying money. He appointed these “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. They wanted the builders served immediately with these orders. 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 never really does. We must keep on going in our service to Him, and never be discouraged by the opposition. It will be there to try do discourage us, but God is always there to help us because of His great love for each one of us.

Just in review, some of the things we can learn from this story are as follows. When we set out to do God's work we will find that there is opposition. Whether that is from the enemy, from circumstances or from other people there will be things that will work against us.

We also learn that those who would work against us may try at first to join us. Their purpose is to get us to compromise and to lose focus and be made weak. We need to watch for this and remember to never be "unequally yoked." "Unequally yoked" refers to a term where you would have two animals "yoked" or "tied" together to do work. You might have two horses pulling a cart or a plow. What happens when you have a horse and an ox pulling the cart? It wouldn't be a smooth ride. They are different sizes and are built for different purposes. It is the same for us as Christians. We can't join with the world because we have different values, goals and purposes.

Finally, we learn that sometimes our opposition gets their way for a time. They might even cause us to get discouraged or think about giving up. That's what happened in our story today. But God is faithful and still helped His people complete the temple even though many people were working against them. When the Lord wants something to be accomplished, it is going to happen. We can be very excited about that. **God is for us even when others are against 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 and the king made a decree and the work stopped. But God didn't allow the work to stop for good. It would begin again despite the enemies' tricks.

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

For younger children you will want to write this out for them, 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 towards us here, 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. Also have a prayer of commitment that they will turn to the Lord for help whenever opposition comes in their lives. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity to do

450 BC

EZRA

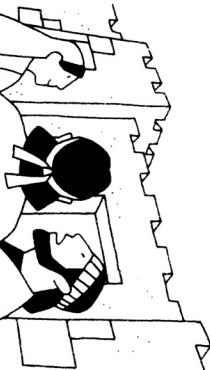
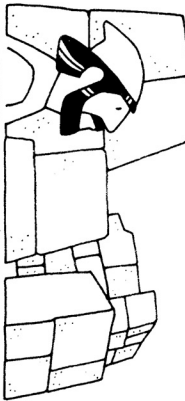


444 BC

NEHEMIAH



REBUILDING JERUSALEM'S WALLS



430 BC

MALACHI



