

Ezra 4 - The Faithfulness of God

“He who calls you is faithful, who else will do it?” - 1 Thessalonians 5:24

Chapters 4-6 of Ezra focus on the faithfulness of God. We've studied the providence of God, how He preserved a remnant as He guided them out of exile. Now we look at His faithfulness even when things aren't looking too good. **God glorifies Himself in the weak who overcome the strong by faith.**

“God being who He is, cannot cease to be what He is, He cannot act out of character with Himself. He is at once faithful & immutable. So all His words & acts must be and must remain faithful.” - A.W. Tozer (Mal. 3:6, Deut. 7:9, 2 Tim. 2:11-13)

Context

The exiles who returned to the land **experienced God keeping His promises.**

- The prophets said that God would save His people through judgement after exile.
- They said this restoration to the land would be like the exodus from Egypt, even better than.
 - Now they march onto the land in Ezra 2 & celebrate the Festival of Booths, worshipping God for His faithfulness to their fathers and to them.

Now remember what happened after the **first exodus.**

- Israel conquered the land in the book of Joshua but failed to put all the Canaanites under the ban.
- Then the people became like the Canaanites in Judges and were therefore driven out of the land.

Now that the promised new exodus is being realized & they are returning to the land, **they are facing a new challenge** from the Canaanites.

- Will they compromise and be defiled by the people of the land like their fathers?
- Or will they maintain purity and holiness, even if it is difficult?

Verses 1-3: Cooperation that Would Lead to Compromise

The 1st attacks were subtle: they offered to help build with them.

- They claimed to worship the same God & thought they could share in the work.
- Samaritans were a mixture & not true Jews because Assyrians purposely mixed them.
- According to 2 Kings 17:24-41, the Samaritans didn't worship the true God.

From **Zerubbabel's response**, they evidently think it more important to appease God than to appease their neighbors. We all face choices like this. **How do we respond?**

Do we compromise our principles?

Or do we offend people who could help us?

Do we trust in God and do what he says?

Or do we do what makes sense in the eyes of the world?

It was a dangerous offer because they would end up intermarrying which was contrary to the law of Moses (Ex. 34:10-17). Israel was a nation set apart from other nations to perform a special task (Gen. 12:1-3) and if they were to be corrupted their ministry could be corrupted.

- God's people must maintain a separated position & not get involved with anything that could compromise their testimony. (2 Cor. 6:14 - 7:1, 2 Tim. 2:3-5)

Verses 4-5: True Intentions Revealed

We see the peoples true intentions in wanting to help. **They ‘discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build. The also bribed officials to act against them to frustrate their plans...’** If they truly wanted to help & worship God they would have wanted to obey the law of Moses in accordance to its commands. They could have helped in other ways instead of building but their offer was because **they wanted influence & control.**

We must remember that Satan wants to influence & control us by shaping the desires of our hearts. Think of our church. Is what is happening in our church about God or about you?

- 1) When you don't get to do what you want to do, do you support the ministry anyway?
- 2) Is a ministry position about a title that doesn't describe your character, or is it simply a recognition of the ways you already care for people?
- 3) If you get an answer you don't like, either you don't understand it or you disagree, do you leave the church or do you seek the Lord in prayer, in study (alone & with others to be sharpened) to learn more before making a judgement?

How can you tell if this is true? - **Check your heart** when someone else gets an opportunity.

- Do you get envious or do you rejoice with them?
- Do you ask, “Why not me?” Or do you say, “Praise God that's going to be done!”

Could it be that the Lord is pushing you to see that what He wants is for you to rejoice in Him and truly love Him and others more than you want influence or control?

Verses 6-23: A Statement of Faith

Ezra included the account from **verse 6-23 as a statement of faith** by comparing the rebuilding of the city and its walls with the rebuilding of the temple because he knew how earlier opposition to the temple turned out. **He was confident that if God overcame evil through their weakness in rebuilding the temple that God would do the same in rebuilding the walls.**

In essence, Ezra is telling us that the returnees **refused to compromise**, and it didn't look like God blessed them for it. They **faced opposition** from the time they returned shortly after 539 B.C. until Nehemiah got the wall rebuilt in 445 B.C. Their faithfulness didn't make the opposition go away immediately.

So how do we expect the **world** to act in response to our faithfulness?

Remember, **they hate God!** They may try to “play nice” and offer to help (because they want influence & control) and then if we are faithful, rather than go along with them they will go from veiled opposition to explicit opposition.

We need discernment to recognize treachery.

Verses 8-16: Rehum's Letter

The authors are mentioned in verses 8-10, and the body of the letter is in verses 11-16.

Zerubbabel's response in verse 3 may have sounded a bit rude but it was because he recognized that the inhabitants of the land operated from a worldview that opposes a biblical one. We can see this in their letter in v. 11-16.

- 1) In v. 12, it shows they view holiness to God as "rebellious and evil". Even though Israel was rebellious and God punished them, they didn't understand the whole story. They didn't see their testimony as being saved by the grace of God despite their sin but rather as evil.
- 2) In v. 13 & 14, they were concerned with the king losing money because they care about the King more than God. They see faithfulness to God as threat to the economy.
- 3) In v. 15, they asked the king to search the archives and find that Jerusalem is a place of "rebellion, harm & revolts". They see faithfulness to God as rebellion & wicked in their eyes.

Don't let the spin that the wicked put on the truth make you doubt.

- Analyze the insinuations and get to the true nature of things.
- Look past the wicked slants they put on truth and trace the logic to see if it is sound by examining the scriptures. Think!
- Love the truth, be valiant for it, speak truth in love. Follow Jesus.
- Build on the backs of "giants" of the faith by comparing what they say to the scripture to see if what they say is biblical and then use it to further your understanding of God's Word!

Verses 17-23: Results of Not Analyzing the Situation

Artaxerxes didn't do these things. He took a small piece of the situation as well as a piece of history (v. 19-20) and **labeled the situation** as bad. The result? He decreed that the rebuilding should stop until he gave permission to start again. (v. 21) **God's work was halted!**

- These event's look like nothing is happening, like a seemingly dead acorn in the ground but will grow in time.
- **Remember, God will be glorified as the weak overcome the strong by faith.**

Verse 24: Fear led to defeat

And so, a **mix of fear** on the Jew's part **and mislabeling** on the king's part led to the rebuilding being halted in 530 B.C. until the 2nd year of King Darius's reign in 520 B.C. Instead of resisting this decree they allowed the "force and power" (v. 23) of the messengers to stop them. They were more interested perhaps in their own houses than the house of God (Hag. 1:11) and stopped building.

In John 16:33, Jesus told His disciples they would have suffering in the world but to not fear and be courageous because He has overcome the world.

*What trials/sin/fears are we not allowing Christ to overcome in our life? He's already **overcome** them in the world if we would but **stop looking back** at our old selves and **realize** that the **same power** Christ conquered death with on the cross **resides in us to overcome** our sin nature because **God is dwelling** in those who know Jesus as Lord and Savior!*

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear (our old selves), but of love (Jesus), power (Holy Spirit) and a sound mind (knowledge of God Himself)!" - 1 Timothy 1:7