



## Sermon Notes

US N°. 40

Date: Nov. 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Title: When the adversaries heard...

Series: #4 of "The Post-Exilic Community"

Scriptures: Ez. 3:8-4:24

### 1. Ez. 3:8-13

- a. Restoration of the Temple begins roughly 14 months after their arrival from Persia (*around 537 BC*).
- b. Keep in mind, to be the people of God begins with sacrifice, with the Temple worship, then with the walls around the city. The strongest stone is the "*Stone the builders rejected.*" (cf. Ps. 118:22)
- c. They first set the altar, now they are laying the foundation. Foundations determine the size and height of a structure. Upon laying the foundation, one that is less significant than that of Solomon's, there are two responses: the bitterness of the elder and the joy of the younger.
  - i. "*The past can be a rudder to guide you, or an anchor that hinders you.*" Warren Wiersbe
  - ii. Nostalgia like this can also kill a church if a church does not meet our expectations in its ministry or fellowship. In our culture of hyped-expectations, we tend to believe that what is low-key, ordinary, plain, simple and quiet must be rather worthless, an attitude that also infects some of God's people. Sometimes we can be so caught up in desiring a spectacular revival that we may forget that it's possible to be faithful even when God doesn't send revival. We can still engage in family worship, sincere public worship, loving intercessory prayer, consistent Christian living in school or workplace. We are told do not despise the "*day of small things...*" (cf. Zech. 4:10). What matters is not whether the church is famous or large, but whether she is genuine. The question is not "*Is it jazzy here?*" but "*Is Jesus here?*"
- d. The worship was prescribed by David clear back in 1 Chr. 16:4-7. Worship is not meant to be "*hit or miss*," there are pathways of praise and worship that God prefers and promotes. (e.g. Mt. 6:9-13)
- e. The worship of v. 11 is astounding when taken in light of what they had to go through to get there. Who would have ever believed that they could be worshipping the True God once more in the city He has chosen. Against all human likelihood, God's people see God's goodness again! It's very simple in one way, but sometimes you need to hear that word in your despair and sadness: you will yet see the goodness of God again. That is, by the way, typical of God. Ps. 30:4-5, "*Sing praise to the LORD, you saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name. For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.*" Joel 2:25, "*So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you.*"
- f. The writer nicely introduces the next chapter when he writes, "*...for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off.*" We ought to also take notice of the exuberance of their worship, why do we seem restrained in our worship of God? Why are we shy in our worship of Yahweh? Is our focus during worship wrong, thinking perhaps more of those besides us than of He who encompasses us? Our emotions should be involved.

### 2. Ez. 4:1-5

- a. The account begins with the adversaries hearing of the Temple of Jehovah being built. Whenever you make a commitment to serve God, be prepared for opposition, subtly at first and then with more open intimidation.
  - b. v. 2 – Their adversaries begin by trying to join the work. Zerubbabel completely refuses, this isn't a nice or polite answer.
    - i. Sometimes narrowness and intolerance is the way of faithfulness. Separation is an urgent matter and sometimes must be dealt with urgently. Good doctrine is crucial. (e.g. Mt. 15:9, 13; Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Jn. 9-11; Col. 3:17; Jer. 10:23; Prov. 14:12; 3:5-6; Rev. 22:18-19; 1 Tim. 1:3; 2 Tim. 1:13)
    - ii. Remember that these people, called the Samaritans because they moved into Samaria, are made up of peoples from among the Assyrian empire that were forced to move into Israel (i.e. the northern kingdom) nearly 150 years earlier. (Note that they cite Esarhaddon king of Assyria who ruled from 681-669BC.) 2 Kings 17:24-41 gives us that story, summing up these people in v. 41, "So these nations feared the LORD, yet served their carved images; also their children and their children's children have continued doing as their fathers did, even to this day."
    - iii. Israel and Judah had been cast out because of their religious syncretism; they could not take that risk again. (cf. the story of Balaam and the Midianite girls Num. 25, 31:16)
  - c. v. 4 – Their adversaries then sought to discourage the people; intimidation can be powerful. The Hebrew word for "troubled" would be better interpreted as "terrified."
  - d. v. 5 – Then their adversaries hired (or rather bribed) counselors to frustrate them in the palace courts of the Persian kings. Not surprisingly, there is corruption in the halls of government.
3. Ez. 4:6-23
- a. These verses take place up to 80 years after v. 5; the writer signals this by naming names listed in history. The writer is citing the opposition and just keeps going, then he brings us back in v. 24. As if to say, "Opposition is relentless!" But this opposition and eventual stop work order is acted upon the wall and the city. The stoppage on the Temple was personal choice of Jews under opposition, to which God responded by sending the prophets Haggai and Zechariah in chapter 5 to get them back on task 14-16 years later.
  - b. v. 6 is an accusation during the time of Xerxes (486BC). It is interesting to know that the Egyptians had rebelled against the Persian government at Darius' death, forcing Xerxes (i.e. Ahasuerus) to march west to put down the revolt, thus accusations against the Jews revolting at this time it would be taken as a serious threat by Persia.
  - c. v. 7 is an accusation during the time of Artaxerxes (465-423BC) concerning taxes given to Persia.
  - d. v. 7 is another accusation during the time of Artaxerxes (465-423BC) again concerning taxes.
  - e. An interesting historical note is revealed in v. 14 where the Samaritans claim their own loyalty which literally reads, "we eat the salt of the palace." Both the Egyptians & Persians had salt monopolies; to eat another's salt was commercial treason because there was money in salt. In fact, soldiers used to be paid in salt (i.e. our English "salary" comes from the root "salarium" which referred to salt.)
4. Ez. 4:24
- a. Work on the Temple was stopped for 14-16 years. The people have settled for "spiritual mediocrity," they became satisfied with just the altar which was an incomplete worship system ordained by God.
    - i. Five years of Cyrus, seven and a half of Cambyses, seven months of the Pseudo-Smerdis, and one year of Darius (till the second year of his reign).
5. Applications drawn from 538 BC for 2011 AD.

- a. It is a given that we will have adversaries, 2 Tim. 3:12, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”
- b. Sometimes narrowness and intolerance is the way of faithfulness. In but of the world.
- c. We need to be reminded in our despair and sadness; we will yet see the goodness of God again. Hope is an extraordinary source of power and evangelism. Just how big is your God? Let your hope and faith be in relation to that God.
- d. Our adversary, Satan, has several tricks that he uses to oppose us today that we need to be aware of.
  - i. Compromise / syncretism. We must hold to true doctrine and not be seduced by ecumenical movements that compromise doctrinal truths.
  - ii. Discouragement to terrify us. There are voices that whisper that what you're doing won't/doesn't count or matter.
  - iii. Fear.
  - iv. False accusations and miscommunication. They will speak about us and our words will be twisted, but we must be very careful in our behavior and words. Rom. 12:18, “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”
  - v. He will form coalitions to overcome by force of numbers, if need be. The criticism of evangelicals in the media or peer pressure is a real life example of this.
  - vi. He will use government edicts and sheer force to block advance (no-fault divorces, abortion, church-and-state arguments, etc.)
  - vii. He does not give up easily, but he will flee. (cf. James 4:7)
- e. There are wrong ways to respond to opposition
  - i. Giving up and going back to your old ways.
  - ii. Settling for second best spiritually; spiritual mediocrity. (cf. Mt. 24:12, Rev. 3:15)
  - iii. Blaming God or God's leaders for what you think they should have done. (cf. Eph. 6:12)
  - iv. Conclude that it must not be God's timing, and that when He wants it done it will get done (cf. Hag. 1:2); we mistakenly assume that if there are obstacles, hassles or set-backs it must not be God. We spiritualize our laziness.
- f. There are right ways to deal with the enemy
  - i. Know the enemy and recognize the difference between opposition, difficulties and God. (cf. 2 Cor. 2:11). Satan uses all manner of stratagems to turn souls from the truth (Baxter):
    - a. a sieve to “sift” them (Lk. 22:31),
    - b. “devices” to trick,
    - c. “weeds” to “choke” (Mt. 13:22),
    - d. “wiles” to intrigue (Eph. 6:11),
    - e. the roaring of a lion to terrify (1 Pet. 5:8),
    - f. the disguise of an angel to deceive (2 Cor. 11:14), and
    - g. “snares” to entangle them (2 Tim. 2:26).
  - ii. Resist the enemy (cf. James 4:7, Eph. 6:10-20)
  - iii. Submit and draw near to God (cf. James 4:7, 1 Pet. 5:7-11)
  - iv. Persevere in the face of opposition, don’t grow discouraged by obstacles. (cf. 1 Cor. 4:12, 2 Tim. 4:5, James 5:11)