

The Attack is Renewed

Text: Ezra 5:3-17

Introduction:

1. In chapter 4, the enemy tried multiple tactics to stop the work but finally it was the weapon of accusation and slander against the remnant that achieved the diabolical objective.
2. Ezra 5 is a wonderful encouragement that setbacks in the Christian walk do not have to remain permanent if we will but submit to a fresh, reviving move of the Spirit of God in our lives. Ezra 5 is the record of how God reversed the damage of the enemy and the work was resumed. No sooner had the work resumed and the enemy renewed his attack! This time it was questions rather than accusations that formed the new tactic of the enemy.
3. Our suggested outline for the chapter is:
 - The Apathy of the People of God (Vs. 1; 4:24)
 - The Awakening of the People of God (Vs. 1-2)
 - The Antagonism to the People of God (Vs. 3-5)
 - The Appeal against the People of God (Vs. 6-17)
4. In this message we briefly review what we covered in the first two points and then we will consider the renewal of the enemy's attack under the second two points.

I. THE APATHY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD (VS. 1; 4:24)

Let's briefly refresh our minds on how the people of God came to this state of apathy. The people of God had become:

- A. Discouraged in the Work
- B. Distracted from the Work
- C. Delayed in the Work (4:24)

II. THE AWAKENING OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD (VS. 1-2)

God's answer to this sad state of affairs was to do a fresh work of revival in the returned remnant. Never underestimate the power of the Word of God to stir and revive a discouraged, distracted people!

A. The Men used for the Preaching (Vs. 1a)

God used two men named Haggai and Zechariah to prophesy to the people.

B. The Message of the Preaching (Vs. 1b; Hag. 1)

Haggai was the first one to preach and it appears that it was his message of rebuke that commenced the stirring in God's people.

C. The Moving from the Preaching (Vs. 2)

1. The leaders responded (Vs. 2a)
2. The prophets helped (Vs. 2b)

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3. The people followed (Hag. 1:12, 14)

III. THE ANTAGONISM TOWARDS THE PEOPLE OF GOD (VS. 3-5)

Concerning this section, Bible commentator M.K. Hall writes, “The section of the book from 5:3 to 6:13 could well be entitled the “Tatnai Parenthesis” as it details the opposition which arose from Tatnai, the governor of the Trans-Euphrates province, and his associates, as soon as the building was resumed in 520 BC.”

A. The Timing of the Attack (Vs. 3a)

1. Notice the phrase “At the same time”. As soon as the work recommenced, the devil got busy again! H.A. Ironside writes, “And, as might have been expected, their insolent adversaries are once more immediately active. Hardly have trowel and hammer begun to be used in the work of rebuilding or completing the house, when Tatnai, the Samaritan governor, and Shethar-boznai (new names to us), and their companions appear, and indignantly enquire, “Who had commanded you to build this house?”
2. For 15 years, the enemy had largely left them alone while they were defeated and distracted with their own selfish pursuits. That’s because a defeated, distracted, discouraged believer poses little threat to the devil!
3. But just as soon as they got revived and then reorientated towards the things of God, the enemy was stirred to renew his opposition. This is how the Christian life works. Those who do little to nothing for God have very little understanding of the battle that is faced by those who seek to do something for the cause of Christ.
4. We could easily get ourselves taken off the devil’s hit list as a church. Just down tools, turn the church into a social club, stop doing anything of real consequence for the Great Commission, focus on making people feel entertained and the devil would no doubt leave us alone. I would rather be in the trenches for the truth than at ease in error! Someone wisely observed, “It’s safer to be with God in the middle of war than it is to be apart from God in the middle of peace.”

B. The Tactic of the Attack (Vs. 3b-4)

The new strategy of the enemy was to:

1. Question the authorization of the work (Vs. 3b)
 - a. The tactic of the enemy this time was to question who had given them the authority to undertake the work.
 - b. The people of God wisely appealed to the decree of king Cyrus as the authorization for the work. They appealed to the higher authority.

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- c. In like manner, when the world tries to stop us from carrying out the Great Commission and bring us under their authority, we stand under the authority of the King of kings and His command to preach the Gospel to every creature.
2. Question the authorities over the work (Vs. 4)
 - a. Comparing this verse with verse 10 reveals that this was a second, follow up question asked of the godly remnant. The leaders of God's work are special targets for the enemy.
 - b. They replied to that question in a wise manner (See Vs. 11).

C. The Triumph over the Attack (Vs. 5)

1. The work was able to continue because it was under the watchful eye and Divine protection of God Almighty.
2. The thought of God's eye being upon His people is both comforting and convicting.
 - a. Comforting in the sense that it brings assurance to us that we are under God's gracious care and protection as we labour for Him.
 - b. Convicting in the sense that it makes us think about the spirit in which we approach our service. Do we serve with a consciousness that we are serving under the eye of our Heavenly Master and Lord?
3. "Oh, they had an earthly eye on them, but they had an eternal eye on them, they had a human eye on them but they had a heavenly eye on them, they had a wicked eye on them, but they had a watchful eye on them, they had a deadly eye on them, but hallelujah they had a Divine eye on them." (Pastor Denis Lyle)
4. 2 Chr. 16:9 "For **the eyes of the LORD** run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of *them* whose heart *is* perfect toward him."
5. Psalm 33:18 "Behold, **the eye of the LORD** *is* upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy;"
6. Psalm 34:15 "**The eyes of the LORD** *are* upon the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their cry."

IV. THE APPEAL AGAINST THE PEOPLE OF GOD (VS. 6-17)

These verses provide a copy of the letter Tatnai and his companions sent to Darius the king. This is the second letter included by Ezra in the sacred record. The letter contains:

A. The Report of the Work (Vs. 6-10)

The report contains details of:

1. Their observation of the work's progress (Vs. 6-8)
 - a. They recognized that the work was prospering and advancing rapidly. The unsaved can recognise a genuine work of God.

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- b. They were not reporting this with joy but with concern and alarm. It grieves the enemies of the truth to see God’s work advance.
 - c. It is interesting that often the people who on the surface dismiss the Bible and Christianity as a “fairy tale” are the same people who dedicate so much time and effort to attacking the Word of God. If it is all a silly fairy story, why give it so much attention?
2. Their interrogation of the workers permission (Vs. 9-10)
- a. The devil’s attacks are relentless against the work of God and He is ready and willing to use many and varied “devices” (tactics) to stop God’s work.
 - b. The central focus of this renewed attack was to call into question the remnant’s authority to carry on the work. This can be intimidating and sow seeds of doubt in the heart. When Divine authority and human authority collide, wisdom, discernment and courage is needed to stand under God’s authority and continue the work.
 - c. Illustration: The recently passed, anti-Christian laws in Victoria.

B. The Reply of the Workers (Vs. 11-16)

Tatnai includes the courageous reply of the leaders of the work. They testified that they were working under:

1. The sanction of the Heavenly Sovereign (Vs. 11-12)
- Note the three parts to their reply:
- a. Their Confession of Almighty God (Vs. 11a)
 - i. “We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth” = they confess openly that they are servants of the God who is Sovereign over all the universe. The reference to “heaven and earth” emphasises God’s universal authority and dominion over the created universe. They appeal to the highest authority in the universe.
 - ii. When we are challenged as to who we are and what we are doing, we need to boldly confess ourselves as the people of God who are involved in a work that has the sanction of the Almighty. Remember, we have been authorized to carry out the work of the Great Commission by Christ who has been given “all power” in “heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18).
 - b. Their Conviction for Almighty God (Vs. 11b).
 - i. They were of the firm belief and persuasion that they were carrying out God’s Divine will in the rebuilding of the temple.
 - ii. Today we need to be prepared to confess that we are God’s servants and that the building up of the local New Testament church is the focus of God’s heart for this dispensation.

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- c. Their Chastisement by Almighty God (Vs. 12)
 - i. While they were bold and courageous in declaring themselves as God’s servants, this was coupled with a spirit of humility concerning their past failures. They not only testified as to who they were but also concerning where they came from.
 - ii. In like manner as believers our boldness is not to be a fleshly brashness and arrogance. We are to boldly declare our position in Christ but at the same time humbly testify of our past. This magnifies the grace and mercy of God in His dealings with us as a sinful people.
2. The sanction of an earthly sovereign (Vs. 13-16)

They now appealed to the written decree of Cyrus, the Persian monarch, as the justification of the work they were engaged in. Cyrus had decreed:

 - a. The rebuilding of the temple (Vs. 13).
 - b. The release of the temple vessels (Vs. 14-15).
 - c. Summary: When we are called into question as God’s people concerning our work and identity, we would do well to emulate the example of the godly remnant in Ezra’s day and boldly declare ourselves God’s servants operating under His Divine instructions.

C. The Request of the Writer (Vs. 17)

1. Evidently, Tatnai and his companions did not believe the claim concerning the Decree of Cyrus, hence his letter to Darius and his request that search be made for the decree. H.A. Ironside writes, “This letter, unlike the previous one, was not laced with so many outlandish claims and slanderous allegations. It seems that Tatnai and his companions were so full of disbelief that the Persian monarch (Cyrus) would give sanction to such an endeavour, wrote stating the simple facts, fully expecting the Jews claims to be repudiated and the work halted.”
2. No doubt they smugly expected that the Jewish remnant was lying and their work would be proven to be unlawful. It shows how God can bring the devices of the enemy to nought. God defends His interests and a work that has the sanction and blessing of God upon it cannot be stopped by the devil.

Conclusion:

1. How important is God’s work to you? What are your priorities? Your interests or God’s interests?
2. Do we earnestly seek to have God’s Divine favor and blessing on the work?

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3. Are we bold and unashamed to confess our allegiance and attachment to the King of kings?