

Return from Exile

Ezra, Nehemiah and the Call to Excellence

Part 2 – Opposition. October 9, 2016

Zerubbabel and Jeshua said to them, “You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the Lord, the God of Israel, for King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us.” – Ezra 4:3

The Story

Ezra 4-6

536-516 B.C.

Main Event: Restarting and Rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem

538 BC	Cyrus issues decree
537 BC	Exiles return and altar rebuilt
536 BC	Foundation of temple laid
536-520 BC	Opposition and work ceases
522 BC	Darius becomes king of Persia
520 BC	Haggai, Zechariah prophecy. Work restarts
516 BC	Temple finished!!

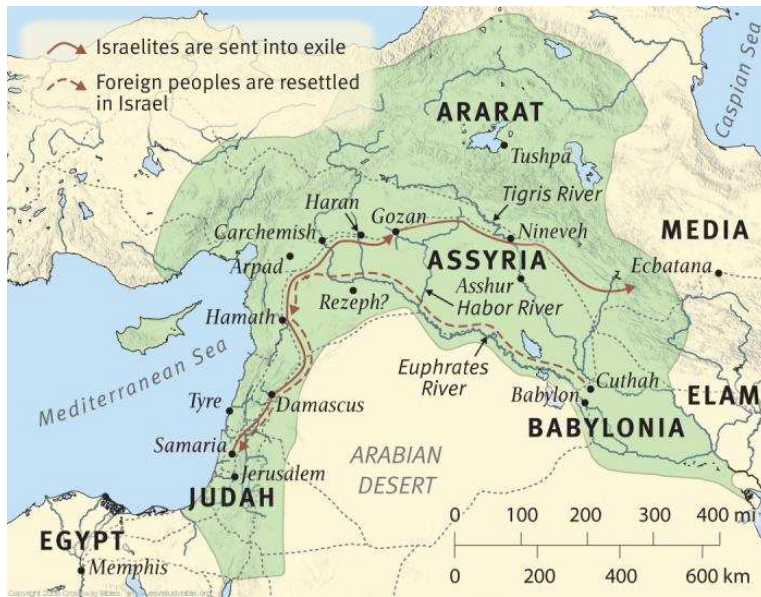
Main Figures: Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Haggai, Zechariah, Darius, and various, powerful enemies of the Jews and Jehovah.

Chronologically, the passage reads Ezra 4:1-5 and then skips immediately to 4:24. Verses 6-23 refer to future opposition the Jews experienced first under Ahasuerus (Xerxes) who ruled from 485-464 BC, and then under Artaxerxes who ruled from 464-423 BC. Why did the author do this? He may have wanted to include material related to the same theme (opposition) and thus reinforce the reader’s understanding. He may have wanted to provide a bigger (and more poignant) context to the Jewish leaders response to intermarriage. Or, if it was Ezra, he may have had some deep and personal sense of that opposition as well.

Note the very different types of opposition along with the different types of responses:

<u>Passage</u>	<u>Opponents tactic</u>	<u>Jewish leaders response</u>
Ezra 4:1-5	Asked to join, lied about allegiance	‘We alone will build’
Ezra 5:3-5	Questioned legitimacy, asked for names	Ignored and kept building
Ezra 5:6-6:12	Loyalty questioned, letter to Darius	Waited for Darius’ reply

For greater depth regarding the first opposition recorded in Ezra 4:1-5 realize that the remaining peoples in Samaria (Northern Kingdom) were actually an eclectic mix of a Jewish remnant and a large number of exiles transplanted from other parts of the Assyrian empire. As a result, and as a practice, they did NOT worship the one, true God of Jehovah or fully embrace the law of Moses, this despite some attempt to teach them the law through the priests. You can read much more about this in II Kings 17:24-41. The map below shows the resettlement.



The Prophetic Influence

Haggai 1-2; Zechariah 4:6-10



The opposition to the rebuilding of the temple begins in 536 B.C., just after the foundation was laid. Most likely the work stopped then and did not resume until 520 B.C., shortly after Darius' ascension to the throne (and confirming decree) and coinciding with the prophetic work of Haggai and Zechariah in the latter part of 520 B.C. What similarities and/or differences do you see between the two prophets? Why do you think they were successful in 'stirring up' the leaders and the people of Israel? Why were they not sent sooner?

Main Lesson: Press 'Restart' and Get it Done!!



The Jewish leaders during this opposition phase demonstrated an exceptional blend of these three qualities as they navigated through the problems and obstacles:

Boldness

Wisdom

Renewal

Can you identify where and how each of these traits was demonstrated? How would the response(s) to the opposition turned out had they exhibited only one or two of these traits without the other(s)? E.g., if they were bold and wise, but were not renewed through the Spirit would they have accomplished their mission? If not why not? Or if so at what price?

How do these passages relate to our application of the Ezra story and opposition chapters?

Convinced of this (staying on earth and not going to be with the Lord), I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy¹ in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again. Philippians 1:25-26

Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:12-14

Next Week ... Part 3 – Devotion