

# Seeking My King & His Kingdom

## Lesson #32 - God's Stirring

I Cor. 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is the temple (the very sanctuary) of the Holy Spirit Who lives within you, Whom you have received [as a Gift] from God? You are not your own. You were bought with a price [purchased with a preciousness and paid for, made His own]. So then, honor God and bring glory to Him in your body.

538 BC. Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon where the Jews had been held captive for 70 years. II Chron. 36:22-23 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, The Lord Stirred Up The Spirit Of Cyrus king of Persia so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah.

Who *is* among you of all His people? May the LORD his God *be* with him, and let him go up!

Note: When Cyrus made his grand entrance, Daniel showed him an ancient scroll of Isaiah. It contained a personal letter addressing him by name! Note the prophecy:

Isa. 44:28 Who says of Cyrus, '*He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."*'

Note: Isaiah died 150 years before Cyrus was born. Prophecy was fulfilled in Ezra 1:1!

Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6) and Ezra (7-10) lead the captives of Babylon back to Jerusalem. Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, is of the kingly line. Ezra, descended from Aaron the priest, is a priest. Clearly outlined is the need for the work both of the king to build or rebuild and of the priest to cleanse in accomplishing restoration. Both are essential in the work of restoring someone who has fallen into a carnal, apathetic and "dead" state.

Ezra 1:5 Then rose up the heads of fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.

God takes the initiative. No one, after falling into a carnal, apathetic state, would come back to Christ unless God brought him back. When the Israelites went to Babylon, they became a different kind of people. Dr. J. Vernon McGee has pointed out: while they were in Israel they were sheep-keepers, or shepherds. When they went to Babylon they could no longer keep sheep, so they became shop-keepers, or merchants, and some became very successful. They became so prosperous, so lost to materialism, they did not want to go back to Jerusalem even though they were still slaves and exiled from their own land. Many of them refused to return when God opened the door. But the Spirit of God stirred up the hearts of some.

Is God stirring your heart to rebuild His temple?

I Thess. 4:3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification:

Phil. 2:13 [Not in your own strength] for it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire], both to will and to work for His good pleasure *and* satisfaction *and* delight.

He is calling you to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. My Continual Choice

Warning: Hebrews 3:7-12 Do Not Harden Your Heart To The Stirring

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, <sup>8</sup> Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, <sup>9</sup> Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years. <sup>10</sup> Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in *their* heart, and they have not known My ways.'

<sup>11</sup> So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" <sup>12</sup> Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;

Warning: They lost their inheritance.

Heb. 4:11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

Zerubbabel leads the first group of about 50,000 people from Babylon back to Jerusalem.

a. ~ ~900 miles in 4 months- Required: Faith, courage and sacrifice

b. Willing to give up their life in Babylon [captivity]

c. The Jews who returned to Jerusalem found their capital in ruins, their city walls shattered and their temple a heap of charred, shattered stones.

Refusing To Be Overwhelmed, This Remnant Began By: [535 BC]

1. Building An Altar: original temple site in the midst of ruins to restore worship of God.

Our biggest problem isn't the actual problems we face; it's our relationship with God!

My altar is in ruins! If we do not fix our problem with God, we will not find the solution to marital problems, our child's problem, our financial problem, etc. Everyone who wishes to change his life cannot waste anymore time. You must start with your Altar, your relationship with God. As long as it is destroyed, your life will be in ruins.

Note: It wasn't necessary to wait until the temple was completed before offering sacrifices to God. (Broken heart & Contrite spirit)

Note: When I seek the Lord in prayer, submit and yield to Him, and confess my sin, it is like pushing a reset button. When I put first things first, the rest will come back into alignment.

Truth: Begin with worship and surrender. Restoration will follow.

An altar almost invariably involves sacrifice, worship, and praise -- the sacrifice of apprehending the truth, "You are not your own; you were bought with a price"

2. Lay The Foundation Of The Temple.

The work was met with mixed feelings. Ezra 3:11-13:

And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw

the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy; so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard afar.

Have you ever come back to God after a time of coldness and withdrawal -- a captive of sin's power -- with a great sense of joy as the foundations of fellowship were relaid by the Spirit? Yet also with regret for the lost and wasted years?

Tears of joy mingled with tears of sorrow as the people saw the temple being re-laid.

### 3. Opposition Immediately Develops

Truth: When you make a commitment to the Lord, be prepared to face the enemy's unrelenting attempt to set you back.

I Pet. 5:8 Be Sober, Be Vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

Truth: A force is at work in every human heart that immediately rises up to oppose everything God attempts to do.

Satan's 1<sup>st</sup> Enemy Tactic: 1. Weaken From Within - Join The Team

The shout awakened the enemies of the Jews who had occupied the land while the Israelites were held captive. It doesn't take long for God's people to grow apathetic, especially when opposition that began as an ominous growl soon became a roar.

Note: This Opposition First Appears As Friendly Solicitude. (Satan = Serpent To Deceive)

Ezra 4:1-2 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord, the God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' houses and said to them, "Let us build with you; for we seek your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria who brought us here." [681-689 BC]

Note: These enemies had been brought in ~130-142 years previously. It is now ~539 BC.

The enemy can masquerade as an angel of light. Their claims are a LIE.

Consider: Satan's most dangerous trick is to lure us into compromise under the guise of cooperation.

It is not very difficult to say no to an enemy who breathes fiery threats of slaughter.

But when he comes dripping with solicitude and offers to help in your projects, it is very difficult to say no.

Zerubbabel's Response: Ezra 4:3 Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us. [Why does he respond this way?]

Question: Who were these enemies of Judah & Benjamin? Assyria Resettles Samaria

II Kings 17:24-26 Then the king of Assyria brought *people* from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed *them* in the cities of Samaria [Northern Kingdom] instead of the children of Israel; and They Took Possession Of Samaria And Dwelt In Its Cities. And it

was so, at the beginning of their dwelling there, That They Did Not Fear The LORD; therefore the LORD Sent Lions Among Them, Which Killed Some Of Them. So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, "The nations whom you have removed and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the rituals of the God Of The Land; therefore He Has Sent lions among them, and indeed, they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the God of the land."

II Kings 17:27-28 Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, "Send there One Of The Priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land." Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD.

II Kings 17:32-33 So they feared the LORD, and from every class they appointed for themselves priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. They feared the LORD, Yet Served Their Own Gods—according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away.

II Kings 17:38-39 And the covenant that I have made with you, you shall not forget, nor shall you fear other gods. But the LORD your God you shall fear; and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies."

II Kings 17:40-41 However they did not obey, but they followed their former rituals. 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.

Problem: Syncretism = blend false religions with worship of God

1. If the Jewish exiles had worked together with the inhabitants, they would have fallen into spiritual compromise.

Satan as the serpent to deceive had failed. God had commanded Israel not to mingle with other nations, or to engage with them in enterprises that concerned the faith. The opposition tries to interject worldly concepts, advice, and methods into the lives of God's people.

These are to be rejected as they are contrary to the work of the Spirit of God.

The world reflects the spirit of the devil, "Advance yourself. Do this for your own glory.

Use religious ways to achieve self-satisfaction."

Satan's 2<sup>nd</sup> Tactic: Weaken From Within: Tool Of Discouragement

Ezra 4:4a Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah,

Satan's 3<sup>rd</sup> Tactic: Weaken From Within: Fear Often Follows Discouragement

Ezra 4:4b and troubled [frightened] them in building,

Discouragement quickly turns into many fears about our future.

Consider: Satan's whispers: This dark valley will never end. You can't live the Christian life; why don't you give up. What if...?

The Veil Of Friendship Offered Quickly Turns To Hatred. (Satan = Lion To Devour)

Satan's 4<sup>th</sup> Tactic: Weaken From Without:

1. Use Of Misinformation And False Accusations

Ezra 4:5-6 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 reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

Letter Writing Campaign: Weaken With Lies: Ezra 4:12-22 Jerusalem is a wicked city;

Will stop paying their taxes; troublesome to kings & provinces; long history of revolt & sedition; threat to royal interests

Ezra 4:18, 21 The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before me.

Now Give The Command To Make These Men Cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me.

Ezra 4:23-24 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.

This shows the unrelenting nature of Satan's opposition. He does not give up after one setback. He keeps on countering whatever the Lord's people try to do to move ahead spiritually.

4. Success of Opposition: Ezra 4 tells the success of the enemy in stopping the work of rebuilding the temple. By deliberately attempting to frustrate these people, by mocking them and taunting them, they discouraged Israel from doing work that God had commanded. These "friends" even used legal means to undermine Israel's authority and right to build. Paul wrote the Galatians, "The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit." (Gal. 5:17)

The Jews had left Persia with much enthusiasm and zeal. No doubt they assumed they would return to their land, quickly rebuild the temple and the city, and then turn their attention to their land and houses. When they found completing the temple would not be as quick and easy as they had supposed, they threw up their hands and turned their attention and energies to building their own homes. They gave up because the task was more difficult than they first thought. To turn their attention to their own homes was not that difficult (really wanted to build their own homes anyway). It appeared safer and easier to put off work in Jerusalem.

How little it takes to cause God's people to stumble. Heed the words in Hebrews.

Heb. 12:4 You have not yet resisted to the point of bloodshed in your struggle against sin.

They have not come up against an immovable object; they have encountered a little resistance. They have the assurance of God, the decree of the king, and the means provided to accomplish their task. However, they became self-indulgent and self-absorbed and pursued activities to please themselves. Israel got used to life without the Temple. Sixteen years passed and the temple lay half-completed, the foundation overrun with weeds and grass. It stood as a mute reminder of the Jews' failure to take care of God's house. Worship ceased.