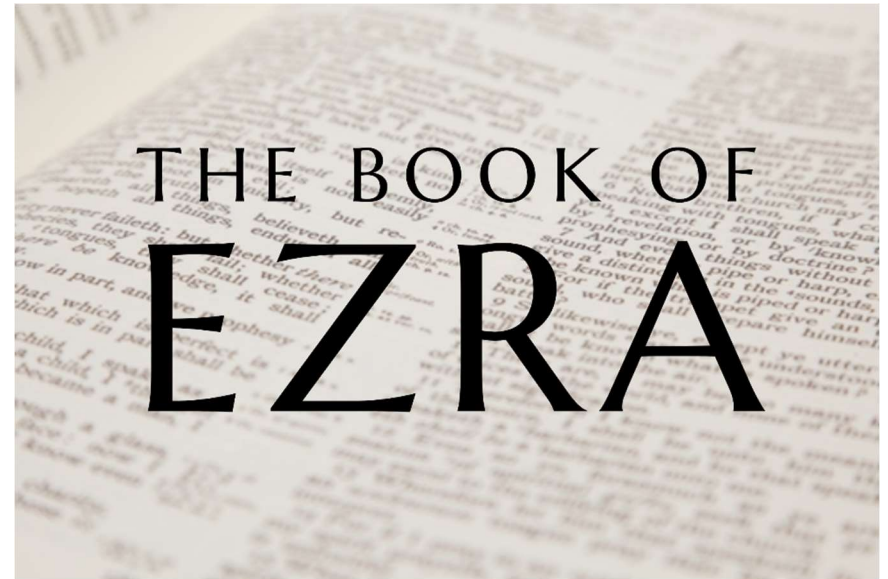


## FAMILY WORSHIP BOOKLET



God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,  
day after day, and that the people of God  
were filled with joy!

## Friday -- Ezra 4:4-6 - The Opposition Escalates

While in yesterday's passage the adversaries to the building of the Temple pretended to want to help, in today's passage they reveal their true colors. As soon as their false offer of help is rejected, they find other ways to hinder the work. They discourage the people and make them afraid. We can reasonably assume that this included generally negative statements (such as "That project is just too big. You'll never get it finished."), as well as outright threats. They also bribe officials in the government to frustrate the work. It is likely this meant that funding and materials were not arriving on time and new steps in the project had to await lengthy approval processes. This kind of opposition continued from the reign of Cyrus (who would die around 530 B.C.) through the reign of Cambyses (530-522 B.C.) and an impostor who briefly reigned after him, into the reign of Darius I, beginning in 522 B.C. Construction on the Temple was abandoned and not resumed until Darius' reign (as we will see later). It is here that Ezra's account jumps forward to the reigns of later kings in order to chronicle the ongoing opposition to the Jews by these adversaries. During the reign of Ahasuerus, otherwise known as Xerxes (486-465 B.C.), the adversaries wrote an accusation against the Jews. It is noteworthy that Ahasuerus is the king whom Esther marries in the book of Esther. As we see in that book, opposition to the Jews nearly took a very violent turn during his reign.

In the history of the Church we find that, before openly violent persecution occurs, more subtle forms of opposition arise. In our time, liberal theology and other unbiblical doctrines have weakened the witness of the visible Church. The Church has been slandered by those who call the preaching of the Word of God "hate speech" and seek to have it outlawed. In formerly Christian nations and in places where freedom of religion has prevailed, Christians are now finding their freedoms infringed. However, this is nothing new. The LORD preserved the Church through such opposition in the Old Covenant period, He predicted it would happen in the New Covenant period, and He has promised to preserve His Church to the last day.

Q1. What did the adversaries do when their first plan failed?

Q2. Who was Asaph?

Produced by Ottawa RPC to help family worship.  
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## Thursday - Ezra 4:1-3 - A Devious Plan

II Kings 17 tells us of the conquest of the northern Israelite kingdom by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Following that conquest, many Israelites were forcibly resettled in other parts of the Assyrian Empire. During the reign of the Assyrian king, Esarhaddon (c.681-669 B.C.), peoples from other parts of the empire were settled in the region of Samaria in the former Kingdom of Israel and mingled with the Israelites who remained there. An Israelite priest was sent to them to "teach them the law of the god of the land". However, many Samaritans (as this people would be called) did not worship the LORD exclusively but continued worshiping the false gods of their ancestors as well.

In today's passage we find that, with the excuse that they, too, sacrifice to the LORD, some Samaritans claimed they wished to take part in the building of the new Temple. However, the Scripture tells us they were actually "adversaries" opposed to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the LORD's Temple. They deviously desired to take part in the project, not to help, but rather to hinder its progress. Probably realizing this, Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the other leaders of Israel refused their offer. By telling the Samaritans "You have nothing to do with us in the building of a house to our God," the Israelites were pointing out that: 1) Those who worship false gods alongside the LORD are not true worshipers of the LORD - they are not "us"; and 2) the LORD is the God of those who worship Him alone - thus the Israelites call Him "our God". Also, they point out that Cyrus had commissioned them, and not the Samaritans, to build the Temple of the LORD.

From today's passage we learn two important lessons: First, we learn that the LORD is not worshipped rightly if He is not worshipped alone. As the First Commandment tells us, we must have no other gods alongside of (or even under) Him. Second, we learn that not all those who seek an alliance with God's people are to be trusted. Those who oppose the advancement of the Church may pretend to be friendly only so they can water down the Gospel or otherwise weaken the witness of the Church. As Paul instructs us in II Corinthians 6:14-18, we must take care not to enter into spiritual enterprises with unbelievers.

Q1. What did the adversaries try to do?

Q2. What can we learn from this?

## Monday - Ezra 3:8-9 - The Work Begins

After much necessary preparation, in the second year after the return from the Babylonian Exile began, work on a second Temple of the LORD in Jerusalem commenced. The work was led by Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, the descendant of King David and ancestor of Jesus Christ, and Jeshua son of Jozadak, the new High Priest. As this was a massive project, under Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the Levite Kadmiel, the priests, the Levites over 27 years old and some leaders of the tribe of Judah oversaw the work.

This event, which took place in 536 B.C., marked the official end of the Babylonian Exile. This was the seventieth year since the beginning of the Exile in 605 B.C. and, thus, is the fulfilment of the LORD's promise in Jeremiah 29:10. (Similarly, the second Temple will be completed in 516 B.C., exactly seventy years after the destruction of the first Temple in 586 B.C.)

Just as the LORD promised to end the Babylonian Exile and cause the Temple to be rebuilt, He has promised to build His Church - and just as He used Zerubbabel, Jeshua and others as His means of accomplishing this, He uses His people today as His means of building the Church. In II Corinthians 6:16, Paul reminds us that the Church is the Temple of the living God. Like the people of Zerubbabel's day, we need to get to the good work of building the LORD's Temple.

Q1. When did work on the new Temple begin?

Q2. How did the LORD fulfil His promise in Jeremiah 29:10?

Q3. How are Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the others good examples for us?

## Tuesday - Ezra 3:10-11 - Laying the Foundation

The laying of a foundation is key to having a sound structure. A building resting on a poorly constructed foundation will not last. Thus, the proper laying of the foundation of the new Temple was a project over which great care had to be taken. However, this was no ordinary edifice. It was not a house for a common family, nor even the mere palace of a great earthly king - it was the Temple of the LORD. The laying of this foundation, therefore, involved worship and celebration. The priests in their glorious vestments blew trumpets, the sons of Asaph clashed symbols and sang, and the people shouted in praise to the LORD. As the Levites played instruments and sang, we are told they did all things "according to the directions of David king of Israel".

Like the people in today's passage, we need to make sure that we do things as the LORD has commanded through His Apostles and Prophets. Indeed, the Church, as we saw yesterday, is the Temple of the living God. As such, it is built on a foundation, just like the Temple in Jerusalem. Ephesians 2:20 tells us that the Church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone." In fact, Psalm 118:22 predicts that Christ will be the "head of the corner" - that is, the chief cornerstone to which the entire foundation must be aligned. As we go about the work of building Christ's Church, we must take care to be building on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, with all things aligned to Christ. In other words, we must build on the Scriptures. If what we build is not built on the Word of God, it is not really the Church we are building.

- Q1. What did the people do when the foundations were laid?
- Q2. Why are foundations so important?
- Q3. On what foundation must the Church be built?

## Wednesday - Ezra 3:10-13 - Joy and Sorrow

We have seen that the laying of the foundation for the new Temple was an occasion for worship and celebration. Mixed with their shouts of joy, however, there were also sounds of sorrow. There were some there, older priests and Levites who had served in the first Temple, as well as other elders of Israel, who could remember the glory of the first Temple. Even after many of its treasures had been plundered and even after neglect under the reigns of ungodly kings, the Temple of Solomon had been a glorious structure. Those who could remember it before its destruction fifty years earlier wept and mourned at the laying of the foundations of the new Temple. Haggai 2:3 tells us this was because they could tell, even by just the new foundations, that this second Temple would not be as magnificent as the first. The sounds of their distress mixed with the shouts of joy, so that those hearing the sound from afar could not tell whether it was a great celebration or a great mourning.

As we will see, this sorrow will be only the first in a series of discouragements that will cause the Jews to abandon the building of the Temple for several years. The LORD will send the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the people to get back to the labour. In Zechariah 4:9-10, the prophet will encourage the people, saying, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel." The second Temple will not only be completed, but, by the time of Christ, will be considered one of the most beautiful works of human hands.

Sometimes we, like the Jews in today's passage, may find ourselves discouraged - especially when we compare our time to "the good old days". The days of the Reformation, the Puritans or the early Covenanters, appear to be times of greater strength for the Church. Perhaps we think our congregation is too small, our church's ministries too few, our voice in the community too weak. We must not use these as excuses not to serve the LORD. We must not despise the day of small things, for the LORD is pleased to show His strength in our weakness (II Corinthians 12:9) and will accomplish His plan to build His Church.

- Q1. Why did some weep when the foundation was laid?