

Chapters 4 and 5 tell of adversaries in the land that were stirred by the mighty noise raised by the workers as they completed the foundation of the replacement temple on the site of the original. We should observe them closely for there will be attempts made by similar adversaries all along the path of the just. The history of the Church (Assembly) established by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost almost 2000 years ago is filled with examples of such attacks, some brazen and violent, others subtle and corruptive. The book of the Acts documents early experiences of the faithful up through Paul's arrest and journey in chains to Rome. The Epistles drop further details and The Revelation gives the outcome, awesome for the faithful, hideous for the false.

The first subtle act by the adversaries in Judea was an attempt to join the believers in their work. The lesson for us is to avoid forming links with unbelievers for any cause, no matter how noble. Scripture faithfully warns.

*2Corinthians 6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? 16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, 18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. 7:1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

*2Timothy 2:19 Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. 20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. 21 If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.*

*1John 2:18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.*

*Revelation 18:4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.*

The scriptures are clear. The danger is clear. Do not forget it. Continue to beware of it. Don't lose sight of it. These Old Testament records of seemingly mundane details of past history have a purpose. The Holy Spirit, in inspiring them, documented the history of the repatriated Jewish Captivity. Their younger generations learned their roots and present position, gaining a sense of belonging. They were being treated as aliens in the land of the ancestors. They were being harassed by usurpers in their own homeland. Down through the history of the Church Satan has engineered similar feats.

Within three hundred years the Roman government conducted ten distinct periods of vicious persecution. Yet the Christian church prospered. Then Satan changed tactics, switching from enmity to friendliness. The Emperor Constantine forced all of his soldiers to be baptized as "Christians." Filled with unsaved "members" the official Church could no longer rightly be said to be "Christian," but it retained the name anyway. And those who had received Jesus Christ as Lord were then persecuted by the "Church". After about 1000 years, the Spirit called for a reformation through various faithful men like Martin Luther. But the clergy/laity system remained ingrained in the thinking of most. In the late 1700's and early 1800's the Spirit separated out some believers to gather simply unto the name of the Lord. Though they flourished early on, they were soon beset by divisions over interpretations of scripture and discipline issues, moral or doctrinal. Yet the Lord remains the Lord. And He is true to His promise to be personally in the midst where two or three are gathered unto His name. Meet in such a manner that He will be there and the Spirit is not quenched, Matthew 18:20, 1Thess. 5:19.

Back to Ezra. Note, the Jewish people attempting to resettle the land did so under the auspices of the reigning Gentile monarchy. They had learned God would grant them favor with those governing them if they honored Him and them. Today's believers can easily spot arrogance and injustice in government. But God has directed us to be subject to them and to honor them, despite their sometimes apparent incompetence or bias. If we attempt to meddle, we simply antagonize those we ought to be reaching with the gospel. We are aliens and pilgrims on our way to our Homeland. Stay focused on mission and goal. Don't fall for Satan's baits. The Lord Jesus will set all things right when He returns from glory to reign over the whole earth.

God saw to it the Jews whom He returned to Palestine were protected and blessed. They had difficulties and set back as new generations matured but God revived them from time to time. He sent new leaders like Ezra and Nehemiah and prophets such as Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. He stirred up interest in the work on the Temple, which had ceased for fifteen years. When forbidden to work by Tatnai the Governor, they continued to work, though he was preparing and sending an appeal to Darius. God overruled the Governor. He moved the King to order the Temple be completed.. AND He directed the Governor to allocate additional funds needed from his own budget. (Smile.)

Tatnai's letter is reprinted in chapter 5:7-17, in Aramaic. The earlier decree by Cyrus (also in Aramaic) is quoted in chapter 6:3-5. From then on Gentile rulers could be reminded of their legal obligation to the God of the Jews. Charters from two kings in hand, the Jews would build on!

By Ronald Canner, September 4, 2013