



Biblical Building

Sermon #7

‘Unnecessary Undermining!’

Ezra 4:7-16

Sunday, June 22nd

Last Sunday in the Biblical Building Sermon Series:

- With last week being Father’s Day, we did not continue in our series in Ezra.
 - Instead, the Lord led me to share from John 3:16-17, as we looked at the great Father.
 - You can watch that sermon here:
<https://youtu.be/JdzJunNWLZ8?si=On1jLlr9SRNR4Ed8>
- ***Two Sundays ago, Pastor Steve led us through Ezra 4:1-6, while Mrs. Hannah and I were away at the SBC convention.***
 - In that text that Pastor Steve explained so well, we were able to see that the opposition of the

rebuilding began, and in our text this morning, we are going to see it escalate even more.

‘Unnecessary Undermining!’

Ezra 4:7-16

Sermon in a Sentence:

Inhabitants of the land were unnecessarily undermining the work of the Jews, and served as their opposition but also in the letter that they sent to King Artaxerxes I.

Intro:

- Do you know that feeling when you are walking in God’s will, doing what He has called you to do, and feel like someone comes up unnecessarily and disrupts or distracts you from what God is doing?
 - ***Sometimes the one doing the undermining doesn’t know they are doing it, or maybe they are completely aware and purposefully doing so.***
 - ***Sometimes this person is a fellow believer in Christ while other times this person is not saved, like in our text this morning.***
- ***Either way, there are few things more frustrating than undermining that is unnecessary and at its root, very selfish.***
 - ****Potential Illustration of someone meddling****

Question to Ask:

How do these inhabitants of the same province that the Jews lived in unnecessarily undermine the Jews and their work to rebuild the temple?

Truth #1: *The Opposition.* (vv. 7-11a)

- *Anytime that you feel you are being obedient to God and His leading in your life, go ahead and brace yourself for someone or satan himself to derail you from following Him. .*

- *Back in Ezra 3, we saw how the Jews were obeying God in rebuilding the temple.*
 - *As Pastor Steve showed us last week in Ezra 4:1-6, opposition had already began.*
- *The difference between last week's scripture text and this week's is that a letter has been written.*
 - Last week it was just verbal opposition from the 'adversaries of Judah and Benjamin'.
 - There were verbal disagreements between these adversaries and Jewish leaders (Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the heads of the families).
 - *But things really start to get real, once ink hits paper.*
- *It turns out that these groups mentioned last week were NOT the only ones to oppose the jews.*

- Enough people in the land (the province) had spoken, and the leaders got together.

- *Many of these people groups in the region are not happy that the Jews have returned, and are rebuilding.*

- *Perhaps they are surprised that their time in babylonian exile did not rub more paganism on them than it had?*

- (Remember, this is just the remnant, so the babylonian exile did rub off on the majority of the Jews, about 95%)

- *Once the leaders were together, they wanted to get something down on paper.... And that they did...*

- *What the writer of Ezra does between verse 6 and verse 23 of this chapter, is insert material from a later time, than that of Ezra 4:1-5.*

- *We must remember from our overview sermon (though it's quite okay if you forgot), that Ezra himself returned to the land in 458 B.C., and Nehemiah would join him in 445 B.C., 13 years later.*

- *This gives us a clear indication that Ezra himself would have known the earlier opposition to the rebuilding of the temple, and how it turned out.*
- Contextually, we must keep in mind that these outsiders were not just opposing the temple, that wasn't the main thing.
- *They were really opposing the city and the walls being rebuilt (which would come later under Nehemiah).*
 - *But they make these complaints first, knowing that once the temple is built, much more is to come.*
- *Another important detail we must address contextually before diving into the text is who was ruling.*
 - Looking back at verse 6, it was in the reign of 'Ahasuerus', that complaints were made, and now in verse 7 we have another ruler named, *Artaxerxes*.
 - (Historically speaking, this is a BIG and recognizable name).
- *Artaxerxes:*
 - First off, I must mention there were 3 Persian kings by this name...
 - *Artaxerxes I* (the one in verse 7), 464 B.C.-424 B.C.

- *He became king by murdering his older brother, he ruled during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah).*
- *Artaxerxes II* 403 B.C.-359 B.C.
- *Artaxerxes III* 358 B.C.-337 B.C.
- *A major concern during the first part of Artaxerxes I reign, was the Egyptian revolt that began in 460.*
 - What made this rather challenging is that it was supported by the greeks, and all of this fighting with the Egyptians & Greeks against the persians lasted until 448.
- *We must also realize that eastern rulers at this time in the ancient world relied heavily on spies (we've seen that first hand with Saul in our study in 1st Samuel), and in this case, spies are going to become a big deal in the case of Rehum, whom we'll be introduced to in just a moment.*
- *A Previous Letter... (v. 7)*
 - 'In the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam and Mithredath and Tabeel and the rest of their associates wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia.

The letter was written in Aramaic and translated.’

- May we never forget that worldly people (those who aren’t saved), hate God!
 - ***So it should not surprise us when they do things to go against God and His people!***
- ***Verse 7 is a reference to a DIFFERENT letter that did not make it into the Biblical text.***
 - Because the actual letter is not given, (as is the other letter in verses 11b-16), I believe that it was written in Aramaic and translated into Persian when it was read to the King.
 - ***(The vast majority of people heard messages/letters and were not able to read them.)***
- Scholars do often argue on the usage of ‘Bishlam’ here.
 - ***In this context, it is rendered as a proper name and rightfully so when studying the Hebrew text.***
 - ***There are those who choose to translate it and view it as a phrase that means ‘in peace’.***
 - Either way, outside of Artaxerxes I, we have some unrecognized names to us that are mentioned.

- But to those of the time period, they would have known and or recognized them.

- ***The Posse Resumes... (vv. 8-11a)***

- ‘Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king as follows: **9** Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their associates, the judges, the governors, the officials, the Persians, the men of Erech, the Babylonians, the men of Susa, that is, the Elamites, **10** and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnappar deported and settled in the cities of Samaria and in the rest of the province Beyond the River. **11** (This is a copy of the letter that they sent.)’
- ***We are not sure how much time has passed since verse 7 and here in verses 8-11.***
- ***But, no matter how much time has passed, it does not take away from the fact that the inhabitants of the land are still not happy with the Israelites.***
 - ***Just because we don’t have the letter recorded in Scripture that verse 7 is referring to does not mean that complaints didn’t come in.*** (Just ask any Pastor, lol).
 - Keep in mind that these verses set up and introduce verses

12-16, but they do still give some valuable information.

- *What we need to know from these verses is that these folks were opposing the rebuilding of the temple and the overall rebuilding of Jerusalem.*

- As one scholar by the name of James Hamilton Jr. wrote, ‘*Satan hates you. People who do not worship God and give thanks to Him are rebels. Jesus said you are either for Him or against Him. DON’T be duped by the adversaries, and don’t be surprised if your refusal to be hoodwinked only leads to more opposition. GOD is glorified when the weak overcome the strong by faith. And no matter how the odds may be stacked against God and His people, all satan’s triumphs will come to nothing.*’

- As we get ready to point out two names in these verses who opposed God’s people I want you to pause for just a moment.

- *Are there people in your life that you try to share the Gospel to or people in your ministry that constantly oppose everything you do?*

- (those who are not believers). Then think of them as we discuss Rehum and Shimshai and then pray for them!

- *Before we look at the actual letter in verses 12-16, we need to look at two particular (BIG) names that are mentioned in this letter...*

○ **Rehum.**

- At the very beginning of verse 8, we are introduced to Rehum.
- *Keep in mind that from a language point of view, from verse 8 all the way to Ezra 6:18, the original language in the manuscripts was Aramaic.*
 - (therefore, I cannot translate this as I usually do with Hebrew and Greek).
- As the Scripture tells us, Rehum is the commanding officer and Shimshai (as we will see in a moment) is the recording secretary.
- *Rehum is the source of the content of this letter.*
 - This is something that we must keep in mind when we read verses 12-16.
 - *Shimshai simply wrote down the content that Rehum told him to.*

- According to non-biblical writing, royal scribes were attached to each governone to report to the persian king.
- **Shimshai.**
 - While Shimshai was a secretary with a name that is not found elsewhere in Scripture, we must keep in mind through the rest of these verses the names/individuals that Ezra aka the Chronicles wants us to keep in mind.
 - *You may be asking (and rightfully so) why are all these unrecognizable (to us) names recorded?*
 - *Because the Chronicler wanted his readers to know who instigated the false accusations against the Jews.*
 - And here are those names as recorded in the Scripture:
 - *The Judges and officials over the men of:*
 - Tripolis
 - Persia
 - Erech
 - Babylon
 - *And the Elamites of Susa and other people.*

■ ***While we can't Biblically identify all of these people, Historically they did exist.***

- What we need to know: *Those who know nothing about God and care nothing about Him, will be the ones to try to oppose us in our Kingdom building efforts as much as possible.*
- ***Our neighbors are the ones we are to reach for Christ, but at times, they will be the ones to oppose us the most. We must remember this...***
 - We've seen the opposition and the context of the opposition. Now let's look at the letter itself...

Truth #2: *The Letter.* (vv. 11b-16)

- Now that we have found the origin of the letter, let's read the *actual* letter and see *exactly* what was said about the Jews.
 - "To Artaxerxes the king: Your servants, the men of the province Beyond the River, send greeting. And now **12** be it known to the king that the Jews who came up from you to us have gone to Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city. They are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations. **13** Now be it known to the king that if this city is rebuilt and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and the royal revenue will be impaired. **14** Now because we eat the salt of the

palace[b] and it is not fitting for us to witness the king's dishonor, therefore we send and inform the king, **15** in order that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. You will find in the book of the records and learn that this city is a rebellious city, hurtful to kings and provinces, and that sedition was stirred up in it from of old. That was why this city was laid waste. **16** We make known to the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls finished, you will then have no possession in the province Beyond the River.”

○ ***One of the most striking and impactful parts of this particular passage for those of us who are believers in Christ must be verse 12:***

- ‘be it known to the king that the Jews who came up from you to us have gone to Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city. They are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations.’ Ezra 4:12
 - ***The world inhabitants of the land at that time regard the Holiness, obedience and allegiance to Yahweh as ‘rebellious and wicked’.***
- Then in verse 13 of this letter, the writers seek to pull the wallets/money bags of the king and tell him that if he doesn’t

stop the rebuilding of the temple, that HE will lose money.

- ***Sadly, most people do what others want them to do when either money is added to their account or it’s taken away...***

○ ***Before we look at the specifics, what does letter mean to us today in 2025:***

- ***Worldly (lost) people regard faithfulness to God as rebellion. Faithfulness to the lost world is viewed as wicked. But why?***

- Though they won’t plainly tell you this, to the lost world, Faithfulness to God is regarded as a threat to the economy of the unsaved world.

- Why do unsaved people think this way?

- ***Because God is nothing to them.***

- These are the exact people that I talked about last week that we are supposed to be sharing the Gospel with. Loving them. Caring for them.

- ***And guess what, welcoming them into our Church(s), so that***

**they can hear
Eungellion
(GOOD NEWS).**

- The letter comes from sources who do not understand and do not believe in our God.
 - As I said at the beginning of this sermon, anytime we move forward in obedience with what God had led us to do, we will face, at times, **CRAZY** opposition:
- *What are the reasons, in this letter, that Rehum gave as to why King Artaxerxes I shouldn't allow the Jews to rebuild the temple?*
- **Rehum gives 4 reasons as to why the King of Persia should not allow the Jews to rebuild the temple:**
 - **#1: The Jews were rebellious and Wicked. (v. 12)**
 - 'be it known to the king that the Jews who came up from you to us have gone to Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city. They are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations.'
 - **Scholars who can read aramaic (in addition to Hebrew) agree that it is difficult to interpret.**
 - The initial point of verse 12 is that Jews have moved from Mesopatmia to Jerusalem at different intervals (times).

- *And that statement would be true.*

- **While the whole letter is inflammatory, seeking to invoke a violent rebuke in the form of a response from the king, there could have been a construction project of a wall that started here, but I feel that is unlikely.**
 - I think this portion of the letter is highly exaggerated.
 - There is no historical evidence that a reconstruction project existed, in this case according to the scriptures only assumptions and accusations.
 - *(assumptions and accusations will only get you in trouble, and a lot of it).*
- One scholar, Max Anders, seeks to reconcile that their may have been work on the 'old' walls, but it was not what the writers of this letter thought that it was:
 - **'The work on the walls was, most likely, simply an effort to use rubble fill in order to obtain a proper substructure for the building of homes.'**

■ *What's going on in this letter is that the adversaries of Judah are taking **Half Truths** and portraying them as **whole truths**.*

- Sadly, and much to my dismay as a Pastor, I feel this happens way to often among Christians.
- We create a narrative based on a small truth (in this case, they were in fact working on the walls, but it wasn't what they portrayed it to be).
 - *How often, and are you currently, guilty of creating rumors that you knew for a fact that were not 100% true, but you still chose to do so?*
 - May we never forget that **RUMORS** do in fact **RUIN** people's lives.
- Those who don't know Jesus want to inflame a situation that otherwise, wouldn't know flames....
 - *So why then do we give them a platform???*

○ *#2: An Independent Judah would mean loss of revenue to the Persian Empire. (v. 13)*

- 'Now be it known to the king that if this city is rebuilt and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and the royal revenue will be impaired.'
- There are three different words here, that refer to a monetary tax, payment in kind (oil, grain, etc), and a duty tax.
 - *The writers of this letter want the King to know that these 'rebellious jews' will not give any kind of advantage from a tax standpoint to the King.*
- *Remember, the Persians had just been in a COSTLY war against the Egyptians and Greeks as they were untied together.*
 - This means that they could not afford to lose any revenue at this point.
 - At this point, as many scholars have pointed out, the revenue of the persian empire was so in question that they couldn't afford to lose anything.
- *While King Artaxerxes I did have some huge battles that he had to face*

(militarily) even in this letter they are highly exaggerated.

- The writers of this letter wanted to 'arouse' the king and strike a cord.
- Hoping he would respond and do what they wanted him to do.

■ *That's the scary thing about undermining someone is that you don't care or take into account their thoughts, feelings, evidence or the 'WHY' as to what they do, you simply make a decision on what you think is best....*

● **SCARY.**

- A true believer in Christ will look to make decisions based on the betterment of this around him/her.

○ *#3: If the Jews were successful in their rebellion, it would bring dishonor to Artaxerxes. (vv. 14-15)*

■ 'Now because we eat the salt of the palace[b] and it is not fitting for us to witness the king's dishonor, therefore we send and inform the king, **15** in order that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. You will find

in the book of the records and learn that this city is a rebellious city, hurtful to kings and provinces, and that sedition was stirred up in it from the old. That was why this city was laid waste.'

■ *The writers of this letter seek to invoke fantasies that would cause the mind of the King to literally start spiraling.*

- The phrase 'to eat the salt of the palace' is also translated in other translation as 'we are under obligation to the palace'.

○ *Again, another form of manipulation on behalf of the writers that they are truly LOYAL to the king.*

■ *In verse 15, they also tell the King to look back in the records and see for himself that Israel had been rebellious.*

- Now this can be a hard truth for for sure, but in this case, they aren't wrong.
 - *To worldly governments and to God Himself the Israelites had long been 'rebellious' and hard to deal with.*

- The writers of this letter use this to their advantage in this particular scenario.

- *Those these particular Jews who were rebuilding the temple were not the rebellious ones, they had to deal with the reputation of their ancestors.*

- *May this be a lesson for us...*

- *No matter how obedient we are right now in obeying and following what the Lord has for us, if those who came before us here at FBCG may have not been so obedient, the community can and will use it against us.*

- What do we do?
We forget what happened in the past and we move forward with what God has called us to in the here and now.

- *#4: If the Jews successfully rebuilt, they would become rebellious and conquer the entire territory across the Euphrates. (v. 16)*

- ‘We make known to the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls finished, you will then have no possession in the province Beyond the River.’
- *The writer’s of the this letter leave the most intriguing piece of all this in the eyes of the King, for last.*

- While it is truth, common Biblical knowledge that the Jews had often (not always) been rebellious under the Assyrian and Babylonian kings, these writers wanted to convince King Artaxerxes I that they would cross a river, and continue their conquest.

- *Now when looking at it logically, these (less than 50,000) Jews would not have been able to defeat the Persians.*

- *Logistics and common sense often don’t matter to lost people. But AGENDA does.*

- So then why do *agenda’s* matter so much to people who claim to be saved by the Blood of the lamb?

■ *Interesting...*

Conclusion:

- When you walked into the sanctuary this morning, I'm not sure if you were one of the two:
 - *A Miner.*
 - *A Messiah Follower.*
- *If we're ALL honest, we all fit in one of the two.*
 - You're either mining for someone else's past, rumors, or current controversies.
 - Or maybe or mining to try and dictate someone from what they are currently doing for the Lord so that so that it won't take away from your current spotlight or sphere of influence...
 - *But if you're following the Messiah, you're willing to accept the following things (these are points of application(s):*
 - Lost people will try to undermine the people of God in their obedience to His Kingdom.
 - Lost people clothed in Christian garments will try to disguise themselves

as part of the family of God, with the only intentions of undermining the family of God.

■ *At the end of the day as a Church family, just as many people did not believe Jesus when He told them who He truly was (the Son of God), we must be bold enough, and gentle, to let people know that we are going to stand for and serve Christ Jesus, the King, no matter what the costs.*