

## Ezra 3-4

- Last week, we began our study of Ezra with a review of the history that brought Israel into captivity at the hands of their Gentile enemy, Babylon
  - We noted that the Lord was disciplining the Southern Kingdom
    - Discipline was God's response for the southern tribes, who God purposed to save
    - In contrast, judgment was the fate of the tribes in the north, who did not receive God's mercy
  - We also saw the lengths that God went to while waiting patiently for their return
    - In how He sent prophets, time and time again, calling upon the nation to repent
    - But at a certain point, we're told there was no longer a remedy for their sin
  - Finally, God began to act in deliberate ways to teach the nation of Israel a lesson of the importance to follow Him fully
    - When it was time to act, God began by removing the corrupt leadership
    - He used Nebuchadnezzar to exact punishment on the Southern Kingdom of Judah
- Nebuchadnezzar's army comes to Jerusalem three times
  - In the first visit, God takes the king, noblemen and educated class of Israel
    - Men like Daniel, who formed the highest levels of society in Israel
    - And the replacement leaders were completely under Nebuchadnezzar's control
  - In the second visit, Nebuchadnezzar removes every artisan and educator in the city
    - The only men he leaves behind are the poorest workers

- Now, the city is left without leaders or teachers
- God removed those in the nation responsible for leading the people into sinful practices
- Then, after a final rebellion, Nebuchadnezzar sent a third army against the city and utterly destroyed it
  - Most notably, he removes the walls and the temple itself
  - Reducing the city to its foundations
  - God's final step of discipline resulted in the loss of any opportunity to worship the Lord in His temple
  - The people were now separated from the Lord in every sense of the word
    - A powerful lesson that sin separates us from a holy God
  - So God's discipline on the nation runs for 70 years, until the time for restoration
- As we proceed through our studies of Ezra and Nehemiah, we will pay attention to a pattern of threes in the way the Lord carries out this discipline and restoration of Israel
  - The story of Israel's fall and rise yields a pattern for how the Lord disciplines each of us individually
    - As with Israel, the Lord disciplines us, His children
    - And also like Israel, the Lord moves through a series of steps
  - First, He brings us His instructions through the prophets of Scripture
    - We are called to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ
    - As we devote ourselves to a study of the Bible, we are instructed into a life of godliness
  - But what if we ignore what's written? What if we persist in our sin, despite the warnings of the Lord through His prophets?
    - Eventually, there will be no remedy for us as well
    - And then, discipline must begin

- The Lord may use anything to bring us discipline, but often, it will follow the pattern that Israel experienced
  - We're going to continue relating God's pattern of discipline and restoration in Israel to the way the Lord acts to discipline us individually
    - As we may act-out our own version of the Prodigal Son, we're likely to see the Lord moving in a similar three-step pattern
    - He'll eliminate the poor influences in our life, the corrupt leaders and false teachers
      - The idols that carry us away from the Lord
  - And if all else fails, if there is no remedy, the Lord will tear down the fortresses in our lives
    - The walls we build to protect our selfish choices
    - Our supposed barriers against poverty, disappointment and transparency that we build to sustain our prideful self-image
    - Our economic vitality, our busy and self-important schedules
    - He'll break us, so that He can rebuild us in His image
  - And just as that destruction process involves three steps, so often does the restoration process
    - God will bring us new leaders who will inspire us into seeking the Lord
    - He will bring us new teachers and healthy influences to guide our development
    - And He will restore true worship by drawing us close to Him
      - In short, He will bring us a King, Prophet and Priest
- In the first two chapters of Ezra, we witnessed God opening the door for that restoration process in Israel to begin
  - Through Cyrus, the Lord decreed that Israel return to build the temple
    - Interesting, the king doesn't order anyone to do anything specifically
    - He says let anyone go up to Jerusalem to build the temple

- This is a free invitation
  - The decree seeks men and women stirred by God in the same way Cyrus himself was stirred
- God's work of restoration must begin with a heart that desires to hear and follow the Lord
  - When God begins to restore His people from a time of discipline, He opens doors, but He doesn't shove
  - He is looking for faithful followers who are ready to follow Him
- And when the time came to leave for Jerusalem and begin the work, did you notice that there was no obvious leader in the group?
  - The Lord isn't rushing to place men in positions of leadership over the people
  - His first priority is to establish faithful men and women who will follow God before they ever think about following a man
- This brings us to Chapter 3

**Ezra 3:1** Now when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.

**Ezra 3:2** Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers arose and built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God.

**Ezra 3:3** So they set up the altar on its foundation, for they were terrified because of the peoples of the lands; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening.

- We don't know how long they had been living in the land, but when the seventh month arrived (*Tishri*), the sons of Israel all gathered in Jerusalem
  - This month is especially important on the Jewish calendar
    - Three of the annual feasts take place in this month
    - The Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement and Feast of Booths happen in this month
    - The Feast of Trumpets occurred on the first day of the month and marked the beginning of the Jewish New Year

- This is the day the exiles re-established offerings on the temple mount
- The worshippers had only the barest of implements with which to conduct the service
  - They build an altar from uncut stones
  - And they proceed to perform ritual sacrifices daily in that place
- The gathering is led by Jeshua, and his brothers, and Zerubbabel, and his brothers, taking a position in leading the convocation
  - These men are mentioned prominently, but nevertheless, we're still talking about a group
  - There is no clear leader yet
  - Even the order of these names will vary from time to time
- And even as they worked, they were terrified of the peoples in the land
  - The group is small
  - It's leaderless
  - It's empty handed
  - It's in fear
- God has brought them to a place of worship that's crude and completely stripped of anything that might offer support
  - The only things present in this moment are the people, a rough stone altar, and the sky above them
    - And God Himself
    - And so everything is just as God wanted it
  - Here, we see a worship service stripped clean of all the things that might have been mistaken for worship or for God Himself
    - They have been brought back to the heart of worship
    - They are at the place God appointed
    - They have come to sacrifice

- They are without all the trappings of religious practice that men so often come to mistake for true worship
  - They have only a heart to approach Him and bless His name
  - And they are vulnerable in a way that reminds them they are completely dependent on God
  - In these circumstances, their dependence is utterly clear
- In their case, this reboot is especially important, because during their time in Babylon, the people of Judah had invented Judaism
  - “Judaism” is a term that describes the system of Jewish tradition and worship commonly associated with all Jews
    - Without a temple or priesthood in Babylon, the people of Judah instituted new traditions and practices of worship
    - Those traditions persist today in various forms
  - But among these exiles, these practices are contrary to the Law and the requirements for worship at the temple
    - So the Lord begins to reset the people, according to His purposes and expectations
    - And we see clearly where the people go for their direction
    - In v.2, we see they consult the Word of God in the Torah
    - They are seeking God through a careful obedience to His Word
    - And as they apply what they read, they begin to worship in the manner God prescribed
- The entire scene is a beautiful example of worshipping in Spirit and Truth
  - Of presenting their bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, and making it a spiritual service of worship
    - This is how all believers are to worship every day
    - Stripped of meaningless and contrived ritual
    - Recognizing our total dependence on God
    - Focused on making ourselves a sacrifice for the glory of God

- Occasionally, I believe God needs to bring us back to these basics so we can understand that worship isn't about what's going on around us
  - It's about what's going on inside of us
  - I've felt this in my own life, as I've moved into smaller churches and away from the occasional excesses of a large church setting
  - It's in that moment, that you come to grips with what true worship looks and feels like
  - It's you and God
    - It's not limited to a certain place or time
    - It's not a certain musical style
    - It's not even music at all
    - It's about sacrifice – and it's a daily, hourly thing, not a once-a-week thing
- And where do we go to get our instructions on how to worship in this way?
  - God's Word

**Rom. 12:1** Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

**Rom. 12:2** And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

**Eph. 4:1** Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

**Eph. 4:2** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,

**Eph. 4:3** being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

- We have been placed into a relationship with the Lord by faith for the purpose that our lives might become a living testimony to His glory
- Simply put, we have been saved to worship Him
- Moving forward, the people continue in their heart to praise the Lord

**[Ezra 3:4](#)** They celebrated the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the fixed number of burnt offerings daily, according to the ordinance, as each day required; **[Ezra 3:5](#)** and afterward there was a continual burnt offering, also for the new moons and for all the fixed festivals of the LORD that were consecrated, and from everyone who offered a freewill offering to the LORD.

**[Ezra 3:6](#)** From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, but the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid.

- At the middle of the month, the Feast of Booths began
  - This feast commemorates the Lord tabernacling with His people in the desert
    - So they obey the Law's command to observe it in this land
    - Ironically, they needed booths (or tents) in this setting
    - They were truly reliving the events memorialized in these feasts
  - From this point forward, the people persist in observing the Law on a continual basis
    - They are practicing the priestly requirements of the Law, without the benefit of a standing tabernacle
    - Notice in v.6, it says the foundations of the temple had not even been laid yet
  - This continuing of worship is itself an act of faith
    - They are demonstrating faith that the Lord will be pleased by their obedience, in spite of their inability to perform everything as required in the absence of a temple
    - They are demonstrating faith and courage by remaining in this city without walls to perform the temple service, despite the threats of other peoples
      - They feared the people, but they had the courage to act in faith, despite their fear

**[Ezra 3:7](#)** Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and food, drink and oil to the Sidonians and to the Tyrians, to bring cedar wood from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa, according to the permission they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

**[Ezra 3:8](#)** Now in the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak and the rest

of their brothers the priests and the Levites, and all who came from the captivity to Jerusalem, began the work and appointed the Levites from twenty years and older to oversee the work of the house of the LORD.

[Ezra 3:9](#) Then Jeshua with his sons and brothers stood united with Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah and the sons of Henadad with their sons and brothers the Levites, to oversee the workmen in the temple of God.

- A few months later, they are ready to begin building the temple
  - During the period between when they began the worship to the point they begin construction, they are busy purchasing supplies
    - They use the wealth given to them by the people and by Cyrus to finance purchases of cedar wood from Lebanon
    - This is the same source Solomon used when he constructed the first temple
    - They likely purchased a few other raw materials
    - The rest of the materials came from the goods in the treasury
  - The building of the first structure in Jerusalem finally began in the second month of the second year
    - This delay in the construction of the temple is significant
    - This month marks 70 since the people were attacked by Nebuchadnezzar in 605BC
    - Precisely as God had promised, the land would rest 70 years
  - And once again, we see the group of leaders named, though in a different order this time
    - Levites were told to oversee the work
    - But still, we have no clear leader over Israel, even after a year of living as exiles

[Ezra 3:10](#) Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD according to the directions of King David of Israel.

[Ezra 3:11](#) They sang, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, saying, "For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever." 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.

[Ezra 3:12](#) Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' households, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, while many shouted aloud for joy,  
[Ezra 3:13](#) so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away.

- After a period of time, the foundations of the temple were constructed
  - And to celebrate this important moment, the priests call the people with trumpets
    - They begin a celebration, in keeping with King David's precedent
    - When David returned the Ark to the city of David, he did so with great gladness
    - He danced with all his might, he sang and instruments played as the people shouted
    - The whole of Israel rejoiced
  - Likewise, the exiles rejoiced, singing and praising and giving thanks to the Lord
    - The foundations represented a milestone of God's faithfulness
    - He had promised a return in 70 years and that His house would be rebuilt
    - And here was proof of that faithfulness
      - Against all odds, the people were staring at a foundation laid in Jerusalem
  - Meanwhile, the older men in the crowd who had seen Solomon's temple, were weeping loudly at the sight of such a pitiful beginning
    - No doubt, they were happy that a temple of any size was returning to Jerusalem
    - But Solomon's temple was a wonder of the ancient world
      - The most elaborate structure built by the world's richest man

- Now they stare at something far less elaborate and wonder if the glory of the new temple will ever equal the old
  - What a strange and wonderful and bittersweet moment!
- The restoration of Israel is underway
  - They rebelled, they disobeyed and they rejected the Lord
    - They were instructed
    - They were warned
    - They were disciplined
  - And now, the Lord is restoring fellowship, and He always begins the same way: He starts with worship
    - Whenever the Lord calls a people to know Him and follow Him, that call begins with a call to worship
    - Moved by His faithfulness and His mercy, we come before Him, seeking nothing more than to please Him
    - We come empty handed, we assemble according to His call, and we come with thankful hearts

[John 4:21](#) Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you **worship** the Father.

[John 4:22](#) "You **worship** what you do not know; we **worship** what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

[John 4:23](#) "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will **worship** the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

[John 4:24](#) "God is spirit, and those who **worship** Him must **worship** in spirit and truth."

- The Lord may call us to build great things in His name, just as Israel is called to rebuild the temple
  - But before we can accomplish anything of significance for the Lord, we must be content with enjoying Who He is
  - The Lord began His restoration with worship
  - And the call has gone out for worshippers, and these exiles have answered that call

- Of course, whenever the Lord attracts true worshippers, the enemy won't be far behind

[Ezra 4:1](#) Now when the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the people of the exile were building a temple to the LORD God of Israel,  
[Ezra 4:2](#) they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' households, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we, like you, seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here."

- As news spreads that Israel has returned and is rebuilding their temple, the exiles attract attention
  - Men living north of Jerusalem travel up to Jerusalem to meet with the men building the temple
    - They approach Zerubbabel
      - "Zerubbabel" means "born in Babylon"
    - He begins to take a leading role at this point
  - We know he's a younger man, relative to some of the other exiles
    - Perhaps his youth made him a natural leader among the work party
    - He is a descendent of David and he is in the genealogy of Joseph
  - These visitors seek to join with Judah in the work of the temple
    - They came from Samaria, the region north of Jerusalem
    - They claim to have a common interest in sacrificing in the temple
    - But as Ezra said, they were Judah's and Benjamin's enemies
- When the Northern Kingdom was taken away by the Assyrians, the policy of the Assyrian government was to encourage Assyrians to move into the conquered lands
  - So, Assyrians moved into the land of the Northern Kingdom
    - Over time, the arriving Assyrians began to intermarry with the few Jews that escaped the Assyrian army and remained in the land

- The descendants of these marriages were the people later called “Samaritans” by the Jews
- At this point in history, they had not yet become known as Samaritans, but they were already considered enemies of Judah and Benjamin
  - First, they were enemies because the Northern Kingdom was the enemy of the Southern Kingdom tribes
  - Secondly, because they hadn’t remained purely Jewish
  - Nevertheless, as they approach Zerubbabel, they see themselves as Jewish and deserving of inclusion in this work project

**Ezra 4:3** But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of fathers’ households of Israel said to them, “You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God; but we ourselves will together build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us.”

**Ezra 4:4** Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building,

**Ezra 4:5** and hired counselors against them to frustrate their counsel all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

- Zerubbabel isn’t fooled
  - He responds, clearly stating they have nothing in common with the Jews building the temple
    - He is saying they are not Jewish
    - They are Gentiles now, and as such, they have no relationship to the work God has appointed through Israel
  - Furthermore, these people didn’t worship the Lord God of Israel according to His Word
    - The Assyrians who arrived in Israel were pagan worshippers
    - The Jews whom they married emphasized the need to worship YHWH
    - The resulting families combined worship of YHWH with the worship of Assyrian gods
    - They were not worshipping in Spirit and in Truth

- Zerubbabel's rebuke offends the people of the land, leading them to intimidate and frighten the Jews
  - And as a result, the people are discouraged from going ahead with building the temple
    - It becomes clear that they never had a sincere interest in building the temple
    - And now, they are doing everything they can to stop it
  - And for a time, they succeed
    - Through intimidation and by bribing Persian officials in Cyrus' government, they halt construction for 15 years
    - During this period, the Jews became complacent and selfish
    - They turned their attention to the building of their own homes
    - They even stole some of the building materials for their own homes
  - Haggai the prophet wrote to Israel during this 15 year period
    - At one point, he rebukes Israel for using the fine wood paneling reserved for the temple for their own homes

**[Hag. 1:3](#) Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, [Hag. 1:4](#) "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?"**

- The intervention of Israel's enemies is no surprise to anyone familiar with Satan's pattern of deception
  - First, Satan tried to corrupt from within
    - He sent the Samaritans to corrupt the people
    - Had Zerubbabel allowed them to join the work, eventually they would have joined themselves to the people of Judah and Benjamin
    - Putting an end to the Jewish race in Jerusalem
    - This was the same starting point Satan used with Christ
      - Tempting Him to trade God's Kingdom for Satan's rewards

- When that failed, Satan moved to tactics of intimidation and fear
  - God's people will always be subject to attacks from the enemy when we step out in obedience and worship
  - Fear of the consequences will always follow when we can't be corrupted
  - In fact, if you're not being attacked, it may mean you already fell for step 1 and corruption has taken hold somewhere in your walk
- Finally, after fear and intimidation, the enemy moves to riches, pleasures and distractions
  - Leading the people to become self-satisfied and more interested in building their own lives than building the Kingdom of God
  - One way or the other, the enemy will work to interrupt the Lord's work in His people
- As we look at the rest of the chapter, we find an interesting and potentially confusing chronology
  - Perhaps the mention of opposition to the temple jogged Ezra's memory about later events
    - Because at this point, Ezra decides to record other moments of opposition that happened years later, during the building of the city wall
    - When Nehemiah arrives to lead the reconstruction of the city wall, there is yet more opposition
    - And Ezra records the details of that opposition in this chapter

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

**Ezra 4:7** And in the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of his colleagues wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the text of the letter was written in Aramaic and translated from Aramaic.

**Ezra 4:8** Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes, as follows –

**Ezra 4:9** then wrote Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe and the rest of their colleagues, the judges and the lesser governors, the officials, the secretaries, the men of Erech, the Babylonians, the men of Susa, that is, the Elamites,

**Ezra 4:10** and the rest of the nations which the great and honorable Osnappar deported and settled in the city of Samaria, and in the rest of the region beyond the River. Now

[Ezra 4:11](#) this is the copy of the letter which they sent to him: “To King Artaxerxes: Your servants, the men in the region beyond the River, and now

[Ezra 4:12](#) let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem; they are rebuilding the rebellious and evil city and are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations.

[Ezra 4:13](#) “Now let it be known to the king, that if that city is rebuilt and the walls are finished, they will not pay tribute, custom or toll, and it will damage the revenue of the kings.

[Ezra 4:14](#) “Now because we are in the service of the palace, and it is not fitting for us to see the king’s dishonor, therefore we have sent and informed the king,

[Ezra 4:15](#) so that a search may be made in the record books of your fathers. And you will discover in the record books and learn that that city is a rebellious city and damaging to kings and provinces, and that they have incited revolt within it in past days; therefore that city was laid waste.

[Ezra 4:16](#) “We inform the king that if that city is rebuilt and the walls finished, as a result you will have no possession in the province beyond the River.”

- We know this passage is unrelated to the ceasing of the temple construction, because the kings named ruled many years after the temple was finished
  - The first king mentioned, Ahasuerus, followed Darius I
    - He is also known by his Greek name, Xerxes
    - He was the Persian king that Esther married
    - He came to power 30 years after the temple was finished
      - Nevertheless, the people in the land were still writing to complain about Israel 30 years after the temple was finished
  - Then again, in the days of Artaxerxes, who succeeded Xerxes, a group of men from the land wrote in Aramaic to the king to complain about Israel
    - Ezra emphasizes that the letter was written in Aramaic, because he recorded the letter in Aramaic in the original text
    - In the oldest Hebrew scrolls, Chapters 4:8-6:18 of Ezra are written in Aramaic
    - Aramaic was a common language of the Persian empire, but not the language of the Persian king, who spoke Persian
      - So Ezra says the letter was translated for the king

- The letter itself begins in v.11 and it says
  - The men make false accusations against the people of Israel who have returned to the city
    - Keep in mind that the group they are describing is not Zerubbabel, who is likely dead by now
    - This letter is complaining about Ezra and Nehemiah
  - Their claims against Israel and Jerusalem center on three charges
    - First, they claim that if the city is restored, the people would stop paying taxes to Persia, especially if the walls were finished
    - A city with strong walls could withstand attack and ignore the threats of armies
  - Secondly, they claimed that the people were historically rebellious
    - They suggested the king search the historical records of Babylon and Assyria, which the Persian Empire now controlled
    - In their search, they would find that Jerusalem had a history of rebelling against foreign kings, which was true
  - Finally, in v.16, they claimed that if the city were allowed to be rebuilt, it would encourage others to rebel and the kingdom would lose control of everything past the Euphrates
    - One bad seed allowed to go unpunished will give incentive for other conquered kingdoms to rise up
    - So by these three charges, they encourage the king to act against the Jews

**[Ezra 4:17](#)** Then the king sent an answer to Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their colleagues who live in Samaria and in the rest of the provinces beyond the River: "Peace. And now

**[Ezra 4:18](#)** the document which you sent to us has been translated and read before me.

**[Ezra 4:19](#)** "A decree has been issued by me, and a search has been made and it has been discovered that that city has risen up against the kings in past days, that rebellion and revolt have been perpetrated in it,

**[Ezra 4:20](#)** that mighty kings have ruled over Jerusalem, governing all the provinces beyond the River, and that tribute, custom and toll were paid to them.

**[Ezra 4:21](#)** "So, now issue a decree to make these men stop work, that this city may not be rebuilt until a decree is issued by me.

[Ezra 4:22](#) “Beware of being negligent in carrying out this matter; why should damage increase to the detriment of the kings?”

[Ezra 4:23](#) Then as soon as the copy of King Artaxerxes’ document was read before Rehum and Shimshai the scribe and their colleagues, they went in haste to Jerusalem to the Jews and stopped them by force of arms.

- The ploy works, at least for a time
  - The king reads the letter and commands a search take place in the historical archives
    - And of course, the archives reflect the history of Israel
    - And because that history is so checkered, he agrees to halt work on the city, temporarily
  - This is king Artaxerxes, who is the same king that permits Nehemiah to go rebuild the walls barely two years later
    - So apparently, he has a change of heart a short time after writing his response
      - Notice, he says the suspension was only until another decree was issued by him
    - We’ll see what causes that change of heart when we study Nehemiah
  - Meanwhile, his letter is sent and naturally, the people in the land rush in with armed escort to stop the building process
    - What do they have to gain in the opposition?
    - Perhaps they want to control the land for themselves
    - No matter the earthly purpose in the opposition, we know the real power behind the hatred in their hearts was Satan
  - Remember once more, this order suspended work on the walls of the city, not the temple
    - Ezra has simply chosen to record a later event at this point in his narrative to emphasize that Judah faced opposition throughout the course of their work
    - The people didn’t approach with sincere desire to be a part of worshipping God in His temple

- They had selfish motives, manipulated by Satan's schemes, and when it failed, they retaliated in pure hatred
- So we read in v.24

[Ezra 4:24](#) Then work on the house of God in Jerusalem ceased, and it was stopped until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

- The work has stopped for more than 15 years
  - It will only resume once a new king is in power, Darius I
    - In Chapter 5, we see the work resume as the first step of restoration continues
    - Israel must persevere in step 1 before the Lord will begin step two of the restoration
    - They must come with pure hearts to obey and worship
    - And they must be prepared to face the enemy's opposition
  - But in due time, the Lord will bring an answer to the opposition
    - The timing guiding these starts and stops is a timing the Lord Himself is orchestrating
    - According to a timetable He spoke through Daniel centuries earlier...