

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION
Ezra: Encouraging God's People Unto Spiritual Renewal
V. Biblically Overcoming Powerful Foes
(Ezra 4:4-6:22)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Right now, we face powerful foes to our welfare:

(1) We face them in the government: reacting to Wednesday's events in the capitol, the Republican-American lead editorial, "The madness boils over," January 7, 2021, p. 8A asserted, ". . . (C)onservatives in general, have grievances. A majority believe voter fraud was a factor in Mr. Trump's defeat and are deeply suspicious of the results of Tuesday's Georgia Senate runoff, which apparently will ensure full Democratic control of the legislative branch." Indeed, neither many conservatives nor progressives think "American government agencies and courts -- local, state and federal -- are inclined to deliver justice, or even capable of doing so . . . This is a truly depressing moment . . ."

(2) We face them in the financial realm: The Associated Press story, "Despite thin majority, Dems move to tighten House control" (Ibid., January 5, 2021, p. 7A) reported, "Democrats controlling the House moved aggressively Monday . . . ramming through a rules package that caters to the party's progressive wing by weakening deficit-neutrality requirements for legislation such as a 'Green New Deal.'" House Democrats intend to increase spending to pay for programs the far left wants regardless if it further balloons the nation's debt and adds to the taxpayer's burden.

(3) We face them in the medical realm: "(T)he . . . November [2020] meeting of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention . . . unanimously agreed essential workers should get vaccinated ahead of the elderly, even though they'd been told this would mean up to 6% more deaths. This decision was supported in part by noting America's essential workers are more racially diverse than its senior citizens," meaning that "seniors were de-prioritized because of their relative whiteness." (Ibid., Megan McArdle, "Dangerous groupthink at CDC," December 31, 2020, p. 8A)

Megan added that "after the public belatedly noticed this attempted geronticide, the advisory panel walked it back," but, "(l)ooking back over the last nine months, it's as if the public-health community deliberately decided to alienate large groups of Americans, usually in the name of saving someone else. The World Health Organization told us travel bans don't work, apparently because they harm tourist economies; then we were told masks don't work, apparently because experts worried that hoarding them would leave health-care workers without personal protective equipment; the public-health community fell suddenly silent about the dangers of large gatherings during the George Floyd protests; a presentation to a government advisory committee actually described thousands of potential additional deaths as 'minimal' compared with pursuing racial and economic equality . . ." (Ibid.)

(4) We face them in the mainstream media: Newt Gingrich, a former Republican Speaker of the U. S. House of Representatives, in his op-ed, "Why I will not accept Joe Biden as president" (washingtontimes.com, December 21, 2020), reported, "The truth of the Hunter Biden story" was "censored" by "Twitter and Facebook . . . and most Americans who voted for Mr. Biden never heard of it -- or were told before the election it was Russian disinformation. Once they did hear of it, 17% said they would have switched their votes, according to a poll by the Media Research Center. That's the entire election. The censorship worked exactly as intended."

(5) We face them in the realm of our faith: Mr. Gingrich summed, "My unwillingness to relax and accept . . . the election" rises from the fact "that I -- and other conservatives," believe "we are being destroyed, our liberties are being cancelled and our religions are under assault. (Note the new Human Rights Campaign to decertify any religious school which does not accept secular sexual values -- and that many Democrat governors have kept casinos open while closing churches though the COVID-19 pandemic.)," Ibid.

Need: *So, we ask, "How can we BIBLICALLY overcome powerful foes to our welfare?!"*

- I. The returned Hebrew exiles faced powerful foes who opposed their rebuilding of the temple, Ezra 4:4-5:**
- A. After the Hebrews refused to let the Samaritans "help" them rebuild the temple, the Samaritans hired "public relations experts" against them at the Persian court, Ezra 4:1-5a; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Ez. 4:5.
 - B. Daniel was dead by then, leaving no one at the court to counter this false propaganda (Ibid.), so the Hebrews faced it for 15 years from the reigns of Cyrus to Darius I. (Ez. 4:5b; Ibid., "Intro. to the Bk. of Ezra," p. 701)
 - C. Indeed, such false propaganda continued even to the reigns of Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes I, seen in Ezra 4:6-22 where Artaxerxes I was spurred to order the Hebrews not to rebuild the city, stopping all their work, Ez. 4:24.
- II. In Darius I's era, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah urged the Hebrews to finish the temple, Ezra 5:1.**

III. When the Hebrews returned to God's calling of rebuilding the temple, He sovereignly arranged for them to be able to finish the work regardless of the opposition they faced from powerful foes, Ezra 5:2-6:15:

- A. The Hebrews heeded Haggai and Zechariah and returned to their work of rebuilding the temple, Ezra 5:2.
- B. Thus, when they faced powerful opposition, the Hebrews kept working in God's calling for them, Ezra 5:3-5:
 - 1. Persia's governor Tattenai who ruled Syria and Palestine and his associates came to the Hebrews and asked them who decreed that they had the right to rebuild the temple, Ezra 5:3; Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 662.
 - 2. God was watching over the Hebrews, so they kept working until they heard back from Darius I, Ez. 5:4-5.
- C. God then arranged for the Hebrews to finish their work regardless of the opposition they faced, Ezra 5:6-6:15:
 - 1. Tattenai sent a letter to Persia's king Darius I to report on the Hebrews' building effort, reporting that the Hebrews claimed that they had been allowed to build the temple by a decree from Cyrus, Ezra 5:6-16.
 - 2. Tattenai thus asked Darius I to search his royal records to verify if such a decree had been made, Ez. 5:17.
 - 3. Darius I searched and found a copy of that decree, and it not only directed the temple to be rebuilt, but that the expenses for the reconstruction were to be paid out of Persia's royal treasury, Ezra 6:1-5.
 - 4. God had arranged for Cyrus to be the brother of Darius I's great grandfather so that Darius I would be disposed to support Cyrus' decrees! (Zon. Pic. Ency. Bible, v. Two, p. 26) Darius I thus decreed that Tattenai and his associates not hinder the Hebrews, but pay out of their own tax revenues to the Persian king for the temple reconstruction and even for its needs for ongoing temple sacrifices, Ezra 6:6-10.
 - 5. Darius I added that if anyone did not heed his decree, he would be impaled on a beam taken from his home and his house left defiled, that this decree thus be diligently heeded, Ezra 6:11-12 ESV! God had arranged for Darius I to make this decree with such force: when he rose to power, Darius I faced much unrest, so he had crucified 3,000 officials to restore order (Ibid., p. 27), what Tattenai and associates knew! If Darius I was known to punish officials severely whom he thought were troublesome, his warning to Tattenai and friends spurred them to heed him diligently, enabling the Hebrews to finish the temple, Ezra 6:13-15!

IV. The Hebrews then dedicated the temple with joy, and restored its regular ministries, Ezra 6:16-18.

V. They also kept the Passover, rejoicing that God had altered the heart of the king over Assyria, v. 19-22.

Lesson: *When opposed by powerful foes, the Hebrews focused on heeding God's calling that they keep rebuilding the temple, and God sovereignly overcame all efforts by their powerful foes that they might fulfill His calling.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. (2) May we align with God's calling for us and see Him overrule every powerful foe's effort against us that we might fulfill the calling that the Lord has for us!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

We apply this sermon's lesson of heeding God's calling for us to the issues of concern in our introduction:

(1) On facing dishonest or inept foes in government, as we before noted, God may be letting the trust people once had in officials keep falling sharply to give room for His Revelation 3:21 overcomer(s) to be conversely strongly trusted and thus maximize their influence once God raises them up. We must then live for Christ and wait upon Him.

(2) On facing foes to our financial welfare, God wills that we work independently for a living that we not be in any need and have a good testimony (1 Thess. 4:11-12; 2 Thess. 3:10). Avoiding debt (Proverbs 22:7), thriftiness (John 6:12), budgeting (Luke 14:28-30), working with diligence (Proverbs 10:4) and investing boldly, long-term, with diversification and regularly adding to those investments (Eccles. 11:1-6) also help guard from financial oppression.

(3) On facing foes to our medical welfare, we can avoid many troubling experiences with medical parties by guarding our health in using home remedies (1 Timothy 5:23), using Vitamins C and D3 along with Zinc to boost our immune systems and ingesting natural versus processed foods, getting enough sleep and exercise and reducing stress.

(4) On facing foes in the mainstream media, 2 Timothy 3:13 warned that in the last days of the Church, evil men and imposters would go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. So, instead of relying on the media for what and how to think, we must heed what godly people have taught and convinced us was true, and above all, we must heed Scripture that offers the insight we need fully and lastingly to equip us to every good work, 2 Tim. 3:14-17.

(5) On facing foes to our Christian faith, Jesus said He would build His Church, and that the gates of Hades would not prevail against it, Matthew 16:18. We must rely on the Holy Spirit for power in living (Galatians 5:16-23) and heed Scripture for God to provide all we need to fulfill His will! Meanwhile, He will keep building His Church!

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. May we then perform God's callings for us and see Him protect and provide so we can fulfill them.