

THE TRAILS OF REBUILDING

William Carey, the great Baptist missionary and linguist, arrived in India in 1793. The first convert came after seven and a half years. Then the work seemed to accelerate, but in 1812 a fire broke out which destroyed the printing house, with presses, paper, books, and manuscripts.

This is Carey's response: 'The Lord has laid me low, that I might look more simply to him.' He pressed on, being helped by sympathy in Calcutta and gifts from England. As his sister commented: "Whatever he began he finished: difficulties never seemed to discourage his mind."

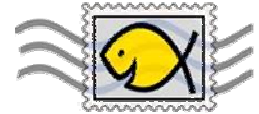


Rebuilding a life once glorious, but now in ruins, is never easy. Yet this is precisely what God has done in Jesus for each of us. He has not only guaranteed that the rebuilding of our lives will be completed, He has also promised to undertake the task for us and in us.

This chapter is a reminder that the opposition that confronts us can be deceitful, bold and persistent. It is also a warning, spoken through Haggai, that the opposition can be a real source of temptation.

God's stirring, therefore, is not only needed to get the job of extending His Kingdom on earth underway, it is also needed, even by the best of men, to get the job done (Hag 1:14).

*"Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the Lord's message, **"I am with you, declares the LORD."**" (Haggai 1:13)*



EZRA CHAPTER 4



OPPOSITION

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Chapter 4 continues the account of the Israelites attempt to rebuild the temple . It also introduces us to the opposition that God's people face whenever they seek to exalt God in the land.

OPPOSITION - SUBTLE - EZRA 4:1-3

1. How can this offer of assistance by Israel's neighbours be construed as opposition?

Discuss The reasons why Zerubbabel chooses separation on this point.

2. How is this offer of help different from the help given in 3:7?

3. Do the means matter as long as we get the job done? Why?

OPPOSITION - NOT SO SUBTLE - EZRA 4:4-5

Discuss the forms of opposition in these verses and how they might prove effective in persuading God's people to cease the work.

- **Discouragement** - You will not be able to complete the work
- **Fear** - You will be persecuted, placing your family in danger
- **Bribery** - You will be thwarted, cheated or suffer loss

OPPOSITION - PERSISTENT - EZRA 4:6-23

Note the break in the chronology from vs6-23. Ezra takes this moment to rattle off the persecutions beyond this one to include all of those from Cyrus to Darius.

4. What do you think Ezra wants to get across by detailing a 20 year (approx) persecution?

In the face of such persistent opposition and especially in light of the decree of Artaxerxes, the work of rebuilding stops. That's the earthly scene. But now consider the spiritual backdrop.

5. What temptations might arise as a result of this very real opposition? (cf. Hag 1)

Discuss The Prophecy of Haggai occurs somewhere during this stop-work period.

What is interesting is that while the opposition was real, so was the temptation to use this opposition as a means of "moving on to other things."

It seemed reasonable, maybe even wise, given the threat of invasion from Persian armies if they defied the King. In contrast,

- Given God's discipline (through nasty weather, Hag 1:10-11) how should Israel have responded?
- In what way had "opposition" turned out to be "temptation"?
- Does a similar struggle exist among the Lord's people today?
- Why obey the first decree but not the second (1:1; 4:21)