



Adversaries, Oppositions, & Accusations – Oh My! *Ezra 4 and Zechariah 3*

Ezra 4:1-7

Opposition to Rebuilding Temple and Jerusalem

Now when [the Samaritans] the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles from the captivity were building a temple to the LORD God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel [who was now governor] and to the heads of the fathers' *households* and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God [and worship] just as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here." 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, just as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, has commanded us." Then [the Samaritans and others of] the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them [to deter them] from building, and hired advisers [to work] against them to frustrate their plans during the entire time that Cyrus king of Persia reigned, [and this lasted] even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. Now in the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes), in the beginning of his reign, the Samaritans wrote [to him] an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem [who had returned from exile]. Later, in the days of [King] Artaxerxes, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of their associates wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the text of the letter was written in Aramaic and translated from Aramaic.

Zechariah 3

Fourth Vision: Joshua and Satan

Then he showed me the high priest Joshua standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this man a brand plucked from the fire?" Now Joshua was dressed with filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." And to him he said, "See, I have taken your guilt away from you, and I will clothe you with festal apparel." And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with the apparel; and the angel of the Lord was standing by.

Then the angel of the Lord assured Joshua, saying "Thus says the Lord of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here. Now listen, Joshua, high priest, you and your colleagues who sit before you! For they are an omen of things to come: I am going to bring my servant the Branch. For on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven facets, I will engrave its inscription, says the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day. On that day, says the Lord of hosts, you shall invite each other to come under your vine and fig tree.

Questions

1. Why did the Jews refuse to allow the adversaries (Samaritans) to help in the building of the Temple?
2. Why did the Jews despise the Samaritans? (2 Kings 17:33, 1 Kings 17:25-41)
 - a. Do you remember why Israel was exiled in the first place?
3. Why do you think the Samaritans wanted to participate in the rebuilding of the Temple?
4. After the Jewish people refused their help, what was their reaction?
 - a. What does their subsequent conduct tell you about their motives?
5. Where the Samaritan sacrifices to the God of Israel holy?
6. Why was it an important step of faith refuse a partnership that might seem helpful?
7. Have you ever had a project, work assignment or other challenge when you thought: “I need all the help I can get?”
 - a. Consider dangerous liaisons and ungodly partnerships that can affect your faith.
8. How did the Samaritans attack the Jewish people?
9. Why did Satan oppose Joshua?
10. What do you think the meaning of the “filthy clothes” is?
11. What “spiritual warfare” were the Jewish people facing?
 - a. We encounter spiritual warfare in many ways: what strengthens us? How do we rebuke Satan? (Luke 22:31-32)
12. What do Joshua’s clean garments represent?
 - a. Consider being clothed in God’s righteousness (Genesis 3:7, 3:21, Revelation 7:13-14)
13. What was God’s instruction to Joshua?
14. Who is God’s Servant the Branch? (Isaiah 4:2, Jeremiah 23:5, John 15:5)

Both the Jewish people and Joshua (in Zechariah’s vision) faced opposition, the Jews from the culture in Jerusalem, and Joshua from Satan’s accusations.

1. What areas in the community, the church, and/or your personal life can you relate to these oppositions and accusations in Ezra and Zechariah?

Do you ever feel compromised by the popular culture?
2. As a Christian, have you ever been treated as if your belief in the Truth of Jesus Christ is insignificant?
3. What part of our popular culture have influenced the Church?