

Ah-Hah!

Taken from Ezra 3-6

Foundation

Spend a moment in prayer before beginning. Don't just rush through this part and move on with today's devotion. Instead, use this time to honestly check in with God. Tell Him your fears, desires, and frustrations. He has a willing and ready ear to listen. Not only that—He alone has the power to help you.

Focus

Have you ever faced roadblocks and people who try to discourage you from doing something God wants you to do?

“God is good! His love for Israel will never fade!” the people shouted when the foundation to the new Temple of the Lord was completed. Priests blew their trumpets, and the Levites who were descendants of Asaph clashed their cymbals—leading the Israelites in praise and thankful worship. Older priests, Levites, and others, however, wept at the sight of the foundation for the rebuilt Temple. They remembered how glorious Solomon's Temple had been and were saddened at what had been lost. Already they could tell this new Temple would only be a shadow of the original. A great noise rang out through the land—both of rejoicing and weeping—and it didn't take long for enemies in the land to come investigating.

“Let us work with you,” they suggested to Zerubbabel and the other leaders, “for we worship the same God.”

Zerubbabel knew they weren’t telling the whole truth. Although they may have chosen to worship Yahweh, the God of Israel, it was only in addition to the many other gods they worshipped. Zerubbabel and the other leaders knew when Assyria conquered Israel, most of the Israelites in the Northern Kingdom were carted off and dispersed among other lands. Foreign people were then brought in to replace the Israelites and intermarry with those who remained. This was a common strategy of the Assyrians when they conquered a land, and it kept the people they conquered from reorganizing as a strong nation and rebelling. These “neighbors” were a mix of many lands and many religions. Migrating south, they had laid claim to the land in Judah during the seventy years the Israelites (from Judah) were in Babylon as captives.

Zerubbabel and the leaders knew these local people—the Samaritans—had no sincere interest in worshipping *only* the God of Israel. Rather, they saw the opportunity to help build the Temple as a way to maintain their sense of ownership over the land. Feeling threatened by the Jewish refugees’ return to the land of Judah, they sought to stop it—in any way possible.

“No,” Zerubbabel and the leaders replied to their demands. “You cannot help, for we have nothing in common with you. We will build the Temple to our God on our own, just as King Cyrus gave us permission to do.”

The local residents became angry and defiant at those words. Their scheme of offering to help with the Temple had failed. Now they wouldn’t be able to infiltrate the ranks and destroy the project from the inside out.

If the Temple is built, the Israelites will reunite and become a strong kingdom once again! Then, they will drive us away, the Samaritans thought.

The book of Haggai (the third book from the end of the Old Testament) describes the condition of the Israelites’ hearts when they stopped rebuilding the Temple. It also sheds light on the events described in Ezra 5:1-2

We can't let that happen! This was a serious threat, for they had no intention of losing control over the land they had enjoyed for the past seventy years.

Realizing they could no longer pretend to be the Israelites' friends, the locals made it known they would be the Israelites' enemies. Hiring people to come against the Israelites with threats and lies, the Samaritans sought to discourage them and keep them from their task. Their efforts worked, and the building of the Temple was abandoned...until fifteen years later when God sent a message through the prophet Haggai.

"Why are you living in nicely paneled homes while the house of the Lord remains unfinished?" Haggai challenged. Using two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, the Lord stirred the hearts of the people to finish rebuilding the Temple. This, however, was met with resistance once again.

"Who gave you permission to rebuild and bring back this Temple?" Tattenai the regional governor demanded.

Over the fifteen years the Israelites had left the Temple project abandoned, the great Persian Empire had undergone some changes. The throne had changed hands twice! Now, King Darius was ruler, and Tattenai made it his duty to report any suspicious activity.

"There is a great and mighty work these people are doing in the city of Jerusalem of Judah," he reported to the king. "When I tried to stop them, they refused and said King Cyrus had given them a decree to build it. I think they are lying. You might want to check the historical records to see if their words are true."

King Darius did just that and was surprised at what he found...

The hostility between the Israelites in Jerusalem and the Samaritans continued even to the time of Jesus! (Check out Luke 9:52-53.)

Footwork

Quickly turn in your Bible to Ezra 6! Read verses 1-5. What did King Darius discover? Now, read verses 6-7. What did the king command? Finally look at verses 8-9. What did God provide?



If you are on the right path and striving to serve the Lord, you will undoubtedly run into opposition. Sometimes this will come through those claiming to be your friends, and sometimes through others who might feel threatened or suspicious of you. Don't let it discourage you or cause you to stop doing what is right. Even in the most difficult of circumstances, God can raise up encouragement and support to meet your needs. Just think: He used a paragraph from a forgotten document stashed away in a pagan library to provide what the Israelites needed!