

**Ezr 4:1** When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple for the LORD, the God of Israel,

**Ezr 4:2** they approached Zerubbabel and the family heads and said to them, “Let us build with you, for we also worship your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time King Esar-haddon of Assyria brought us here.”

**Ezr 4:3** But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the other heads of Israel’s families answered them, “You may have no part with us in building a house for our God, since we alone will build it for the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us.”

**Ezr 4:4** Then the people who were already in the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build.

**Ezr 4:5** They also bribed officials to act against them to frustrate their plans throughout the reign of King Cyrus of Persia and until the reign of King Darius of Persia.

They make enemies of people with political clout, who gather together and write a letter of accusation against the Israelites, and send it to King Xerxes...

**Ezr 4:12** Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came from you have returned to us at Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and evil city, finishing its walls, and repairing its foundations.

**Ezr 4:13** Let it now be known to the king that if that city is rebuilt and its walls are finished, they will not pay tribute, duty, or land tax, and the royal revenue will suffer.

**Ezr 4:14** Since we have taken an oath of loyalty to the king, and it is not right for us to witness his dishonor, we have sent to inform the king

**Ezr 4:15** that a search should be made in your predecessors' record books. In these record books you will discover and verify that the city is a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces. There have been revolts in it since ancient times. That is why this city was destroyed.

**Ezr 4:16** We advise the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are finished, you will not have any possession west of the Euphrates.

Xerxes conducts a search and commands that the building stops

**Ezr 4:24** Now the construction of God's house in Jerusalem had stopped and remained at a standstill until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia.

Geez Z- all this because you wouldn't let the people join in and help build the temple??

Enemies- polytheistic peoples of the land, who Z does not want to take part in a sacred and holy work, as worship unto God, because they themselves are not set apart unto Yahweh alone.

The people of God were called to come out of a foreign land, Babylon, with its pagan ways of living, and be SET APART as a HOLY people, and PARTNER with God in a holy work. They were being called to RETURN to a life of UNDIVIDED DEVOTION to Yahweh. That was going to require a radical turning away from the surrounding culture and its customs, and even an unlearning of the culture and customs that they had been immersed in for decades!

This was going to be a REFORMATION, a PURIFYING of their hearts, their minds, their worship, their entire lives, as they behold Yahweh and seek His heart.

Mary Oliver once said, "Attention is the beginning of devotion."

Z has said NO to the pagan peoples help in building not because they couldn't use the man power, and not to be a jerk, but because this was an act of holy and sacred devotion unto God, and the people of the land's hearts were not devoted to Him.

**Lev 20:26** You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be mine.

*baw-dal'*

A primitive root; to *divide* (in various senses literally or figuratively, *separate, distinguish, differ, select*, etc.): - (make, put) difference, divide (asunder), (make) separate (self, -ation), sever (out), X utterly.

Z knew that they were called to live set apart and distinguishable from all the other nation, and how was that going to be possible if they were in a place of being influenced by the pagan peoples?

This is something the church faces today... we are called to be in the world but not of the world, but do we do that well?? Do we know how to truly love people and walk in holiness, set apart unto God?

Compromises, out of fear? Deception?

Andrew and Dira

Sexuality

Church influencers, Christian celebrity, "I get famous while I make you famous"

The Reset- Jeremy Riddle "Returning to the Heart of Worship and a Life of Undivided Devotion"

Idol of influence

This is what happens when we are influenced by the culture around us, and allow the world to shape the culture of the church. Before too long we can look just like the world, no longer distinguishable. The world doesn't need a repetitive picture of itself, it needs a picture of Jesus!!

Part of my story- childhood sing for Jesus, middle school guitar and song writing christian artist, high school 00's record deal, loose my self, walked away grieved by what once was pure I allowed to be sullied by the appetites of the world. Step away, once again be set apart, still sing and make meoldies to the Lord and it is SO MUCH BETTER

Paul's exhortation to the christians living in the pagan land of Rome

**Rom 12:1** And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for

you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.

**Rom 12:2** Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

**Jas 4:4** You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.

**Jas 4:5** Do you think the Scriptures have no meaning? They say that God is passionate that the spirit he has placed within us should be faithful to him.

**Jas 4:6** And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

**Jas 4:7** So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

**Jas 4:8** Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world.

In the choice to live set apart the people of God made enemies, but the enemies weren't in truth the humans themselves, but the kingdom of darkness!! As Ephesians 6:12 reminds us, not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

Choosing to be set apart and partner with God in the building of his Kingdom is CONTESTED GROUND!!

“There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square inch, every split second is claimed by God, and counter claimed by Satan.” -C.S. Lewis

There was no wall... It had to feel extremely vulnerable to have now made enemies, and to worship God out in the open, surrounded by enemy territory! They grew fearful and intimidated, and stopped the work!! The building project was paused for around 15-17 YEARS! Was it not God himself who moved on Cyrus's heart to send the Israelites back to Jerusalem?? The enemy opposition did not take God by surprise, and he had reason as to call them to build an altar first, and not build a wall...

**Zec 2:1** Then I looked up, and there before me was a man with a measuring line in his hand.

**Zec 2:2** I asked, "Where are you going?" He answered me, "To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and how long it is."

**Zec 2:3** While the angel who was speaking to me was leaving, another angel came to meet him

**Zec 2:4** and said to him: "Run, tell that young man, 'Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of people and animals in it.

**Zec 2:5** And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,' declares the LORD, 'and I will be its glory within.'

God had proven himself over and over again to be their faithful refuge!! HE WANTS TO BE THEIR SHIELD OF PROTECTION! And not only that, but His Glory, his manifest PRESENCE would FILL the city!! Not just the temple, like in the first temple, but the entire CITY!!

Could it be, that the instruction to not build a wall when they entered the land was not only an exercise in faith for the people of God, to trust Him as their refuge, but ALSO an opportunity for the surrounding peoples and nations to witness the union and communion between Yahweh and his people?!

This is a dual fulfillment prophecy!!

Snow globe and our home (silly microcosm)

We live in a love story set in a world at war, and the enemy opposition is fierce- Satan would have us tap out, and back down, and compromise, fearful, cowering, but GREATER IS HE THAT IS IN ME, Greater is he that surrounds us and who's presence fills us and our midst.

“It may look like I'm surrounded but I'm surrounded by you.”

May we be a people without compromise, that boldly live set apart, displays the love and glory of God, and trusts Him to be the wall of firey protection against the kingdom of darkness!!

Prayer: