

Ezra 4:1-5,24

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[0:00] In Jesus' name, amen. I was reading this afternoon the State of the Bible survey that was put out recently.

! They do them, a number of them. It's called the State of the Bible or State of Scripture in the United States. And only 36% of individuals believe that Scripture is absolutely true. Only 36%. Over 54% of Americans say the Bible has had a direct impact on their life, but only 36% say that it is absolutely true in every part and every portion.

I am thankful to be one of that 36% if it is so, and I trust that we will be that way as well, because I believe that the Word of God is true in every respect, in every manner, and in every word.

I believe in the inspiration of Scripture. I believe what we have before us is the full canonization of Scripture, the 66 books that it contains. Everything that is fitting to be edified and to grow in our walk with Christ is there, and that is the challenge that we have before us, to study the Word of God and to look for it and to see it with accuracy.

[1:17] This chapter is one of those chapters in which I labor over because on the surface it seems pretty easy, but it really has an impact of how you study the pages that follow in Scripture.

And because of that belief that Scripture is absolutely accurate, when I come to a challenging portion of Scripture, I have one of two things that I can say.

Either one, the author of Scripture made a mistake, or two, I don't understand what he's doing yet, so I need to dig a little further. And I lean on the second one. I do not believe there are any mistakes in Scripture.

I believe that it is really a misunderstanding by the reader of Scripture, and that would be me at that time. Now, I say that because Ezra and Nehemiah are contemporaries of one another. Now, this has application.

I want you to know when we're looking at the text the way we are. Ezra and Nehemiah are contemporaries of one another. At the same time, they both enter into, or in similar times, they enter into the city of Jerusalem.

[2:25] Ezra does not come to Jerusalem until Ezra chapter 7. So everything that Ezra is writing before we get to the 7th chapter are not firsthand personal eyewitness accounts recorded by Ezra.

They are really Ezra writing from within the Persian Empire in the region of Babylon as he has access to the royal archives, and he has access to the books and pages there, and everything that is before him, and he has an understanding.

Ezra sets his heart, it tells us in Ezra chapter 7, to understand the word of the Lord so that he may instruct the people of the Lord in the ways of God. Ezra is a priest. Of the high priest lineage.

Nehemiah is not a priest. He is a political worker. Nehemiah hears, if you remember, in Nehemiah chapter 1. Now, I say this on the front end. You cannot study the book of Ezra without also considering the book of Nehemiah.

You have to look at them together. Now, while we're not studying them together, you have to kind of consider them together. In the Jewish scripture, Ezra and Nehemiah was one book. It is just like we have it here, but it was one book.

[3:31] We have broken it up into two, but still, it is very becoming of us to understand them, or to look at them in consideration of one another. Nehemiah, if you remember, while he was the king's cupbearer, asked regarding the exiles who had returned to Jerusalem, and he found out that they were in disarray and disrepair because the walls were torn

down.

So, Nehemiah, a political leader, gets access from the political realm to go and do a political work of rebuilding the walls. That is a political work because he re-fortifies a city.

Ezra leaves with the same type of commissioning. A king commissions Ezra to go back in the priestly work as he edifies the people. When we open up the book of Nehemiah, we find Ezra there as well.

We don't find Nehemiah in the book of Ezra, but we find Ezra in the book of Nehemiah. It makes you scratch your head a little bit, doesn't it? If you're not confused yet, stay with me. I'll get you there. So, when we go, by the time we get to Nehemiah chapter 7, they're celebrating a feast. And they're celebrating the same feast that we've just read about in Ezra chapter 3, that feast in the seventh month. Now, at that feast, as Nehemiah is there as the political representative, Ezra is there.

[4:44] And the very first time we ever find someone doing what I'm doing tonight, standing on a platform before a people of the Lord, declaring the word of God is in Nehemiah 7. First time we ever find that.

And the very first person we find doing that is Ezra. And so, Ezra is there at the same time. Now, I say this, all of that, to say this.

Within the chapter of Ezra 4, we have a great parenthetical insertion that is starting in verse 6, from verse 6 all the way to verse 23.

Not to get you bent out of shape, are not in chronological order. I'll let you, I'll kind of hopefully clarify for you while they are there.

Now, I'm trying to equip you in this because there are some who will tell you. We are introduced to three names of three different kings. Actually, we're introduced to Cyrus, Darius, Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes.

[5:44] You ought to pay attention. So, it's four kings here. Ahasuerus, you ought to know because he is the king of the book of Esther. He is the king who is also called Xerxes. Not Artaxerxes, but Xerxes, who reigns and he ends up choosing Esther to be his queen.

That's Ahasuerus, happens at the same time. Artaxerxes is the king that follows Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes is the king that Nehemiah is the cupbearer to, and he is the one that he gives permission for Nehemiah to go back.

What we have, though, is that by the time the question before us, now, I'm getting to this because I'm trusting you are the Wednesday night crowd, and you come ready to think. After you eat a good meal, you want to think. And I know you're ready to think.

The age-old question, and there are some Bible scholars that will tell you that Nehemiah was there first, they rebuilt the walls, and then Ezra and the people come back later, and they rebuild the temple. And I don't think that's accurate at all.

I believe they rebuild the temple first. They're not inhabiting, and they have proof texts as to why they would say that, and I'm talking about good Bible scholars and even pastors. But to understand it accurately, and they use this chapter as being the one that says, see, all these people, and they're using the words Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes as being names for the kings because they are actually not proper names.

[7:05] They are titles. And so they simply say, well, that is another name for Cyrus or another name for Darius, and that's really not what's going on. So now that I've got it all muddled up for you, let's see if we can clarify it just a little bit, okay?

Because we're only going to look at the first five verses, and then we're going to look down at the last verse, and then I will let you know why we didn't look at the verses in the middle because they apply to the time of Nehemiah, not to the time before us.

Ezra was present when they happened because he was there with Nehemiah, but they were not the things that took place now. Everybody understand? By this time, the foundation of the temple has been laid.

By this time, the altar has been rebuilt upon the foundation that was in existence. The very first thing the exiles did when they returned was rebuild the altar of the Lord. Why did they rebuild the altar of the Lord?

For they were fearful of the peoples of the land. And they began to worship the Lord through sacrificial system. Then they laid the foundation stones for the temple. And we find that in the third chapter.

[8:14] Some are rejoicing and some are weeping. We saw how we needed both. We need those who rejoice in the moment before them that God is opening the door. And we need those who weep over the reality that their sins of the past have cost them greatly for the temple structure does not compare to Solomon's temple.

And God had stirred the hearts of these people, and each one of them were there, commingled, those weeping and those rejoicing. And all the people of the land heard them. So by this time, the exiles, the small remnant of 42,000 plus, have come back.

They are not living within the realm of Jerusalem. That's why when Nehemiah completes the walls, it says the houses have not been rebuilt yet. In Nehemiah chapter 6, I believe it is, or maybe in the 7th chapter.

Some people say, see, that tells you the inhabitants haven't come back yet because the walls haven't been rebuilt. No, study the book of Ezra accurately, and each one went to his own region. They did not live in Jerusalem because Jerusalem was not an inhabited area because it was a town in disarray.

They didn't want to live in a city such as that, so they went and lived in Bethlehem. They went and lived in all the other regions that they were from. That is also why it tells us in the 3rd chapter, and these are keys to understanding Scripture.

[9:23] I'm challenging you a little bit tonight. That it tells us that when they began to do this, all came back to Jerusalem as one man. So that should tell us, oh, they're not living there. They have to travel there, right? So, now we know Nehemiah is not present yet.

Neither is Ezra. They're laying the foundation stones, and they're rejoicing. And then we get to the 4th chapter. And it tells us, Now when the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the people of the exile were building a temple to the Lord God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' households and said to them, Let us build with you, for we, like you, seek your God.

And we have been sacrificing to him since the days of Esrahaddon, king of Assyria, who brought us up here. But Zerubbabel and Joshua and the rest of the heads of the 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 as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, has commanded us. Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and frightened them from building and hired counselors against them to frustrate their counsel all the days of Cyrus, king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius, king of Persia.

Go to the last verse of the chapter, verse 24. Then work on the house of God in Jerusalem ceased, and it was stopped until the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia.

[10:55] So we see from the first five verses, and then in the 24th verse, I want you to see this evening discouraged by the enemy.

Discouraged by the enemy. Just very quickly so that you can understand why we left out that portion. If you were to look in verse 6, you will see it says, Now in the reign of Ahasuerus, and then if you look in verse 7, it says, And in the days of Artaxerxes.

And then if you were to go over to verse 11, To king Artaxerxes. And then it says that king Artaxerxes responded to them in verse 17. And if you were to read those texts, you will find that the letter written to the king says nothing about the reconstruction of the temple, but rather they tell Artaxerxes they are rebuilding the walls.

Now who rebuilds the walls? That's Nehemiah, right? So it has no application. Those things were built after Darius' reign. And if you were to look, it goes King Cyrus, King Darius, King Ahasuerus, and then King Artaxerxes.

There is another king that is in the midst of Darius and Ahasuerus that we do not have mentioned in scripture. He only reigned, I believe it's Cambyses. He only reigned for, you know, like a year or so.

[12:11] There was very short reigning there. But they have no biblical record to them, and they are not, while they are recorded in history, they don't have no impact. So we can date these reigns through Ezra,

Esser, and Nehemiah.

Okay? It is King Cyrus who issues the rebuilding of the temple, and it is the people who come back. We will see why those are there, because, again, this is why it takes place, that Ezra is writing retrospectively, looking back.

A number of years pass by the time Ezra comes back, and the temple is already rebuilt by the time Ezra comes back. So he's looking back and telling us what is happening. But what he records in verses 6 through 23 are, at that time, current events that are taking place during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, and it reinforces the application we have here of the enemy.

But I want you to see, because the work has begun there in the third chapter, I want you to see the discouragement brought on by the enemy. How does the enemy discourage the people of the Lord from the work they have been called to do?

The whole reasoning behind the parenthetical insertion, 6 through 23, is to remind us that this was not a one-time event. They discouraged them when they were rebuilding the temple for a number of years.

[13:35] They discouraged them again while they were rebuilding the walls. They came against them in the same manner. It is just this repetitious event. And what Ezra is doing is, they did it then, they're still doing it now, and guess what?

The enemy still operates in the same way. So we need to understand the discouraging tactics of the enemy and how the people of the Lord cease from doing what God has called them to do.

The first thing that we notice here is the proximity of the enemy. That is, how very near the enemy is. In the third chapter, it tells us that the reasoning behind their rebuilding the altar was because they feared the peoples of the lands.

Now, that should be telling because these are the people of the land. The whole problem that the enemy has, that is, the inhabitants of that land, is that they have made themselves at home there for 70 plus years.

The Jewish nation has been exiled, at least the overwhelming majority of them, and the few that have been left behind have intermarried with the people that the Assyrian king had brought into that region. And so we have the Samaritans and we have all those who are now intermingled and intermarried.

[14:47] We see it being fleshed out even in the end chapters of Ezra. We see it also in the end chapters of Nehemiah. So much so, they're pulling people's hair out and all these things that are taking place because of their holy anger and wrath.

But what we find are the people are people of the land. That is, they have made themselves at home in land that was not theirs. And they have a problem with someone coming back and resettling their land.

And so the territory that they thought was there is referred to over and over again as the people of the land, the people of the land. There are two different groups here, the people of the Lord and the people of the land.

Those who have made themselves at home in the world that really was not theirs to begin with because God had deeded it over to Abraham. And then the people of the Lord who had a rightful possession of it.

By the way, the battle still rages today. And the battle that rages today are the people of the land, that is, the people have made themselves at home in this world and the people of the Lord. And it is the same battle being fought on different fronts.

[15:45] And it is an opportunity seeking to discourage the workers and laborers of the Lord because they seem to be, quote, losing ground. That is why we have so many people trying to cast doubt upon the word of God.

We notice here the proximity. It says, now when the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the people of the exile were building a temple to the Lord God of Israel. Now, it is no wonder that they heard because they saw the smoke ascending from the altar.

And it tells us that they also heard the sound of the shouts of rejoicing and the weeping and crying found at the end of the third chapter says that it was heard far away. But we notice here, too, the proximity that the enemy was close enough to hear this reality.

And then the enemy responded. The people of the Lord have always had a problem thinking that their enemy is somewhere far off when the reality is Scripture tells us that he is very near. The very first sin ever introduced into mankind after the fall, that is, when Cain slew his brother, we understand that the Lord told him that sin was near, seeking at the very door, crouching, trying to take him captive.

[16:52] And he paid no attention to that. We are told that our enemy prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour and destroy. And we have a tendency to think that the enemy is somewhere out there when the reality is that the enemy is always close enough to hear us.

And when they hear that they are doing this and they respond, and look how close they get because they come to them, they approach them, and they bring this challenge. It is the enemy who comes before them and comes into the very confines of Jerusalem.

And it would not be very hard for them to do that because at this time, the walls were still torn apart. Now, some people believe, and I think this could be an accurate translation, that the letter that we find in the verses 6 through 23 was not the reconstruction of Nehemiah's wall, but after they rebuilt the temple, they started trying to re-fortify their wall.

And it was before Nehemiah had royal commission to rebuild the wall, and the enemy saw that and tried to put a stop to it, and Artaxerxes did let them stop it. Nehemiah actually ended up getting a commission from Artaxerxes and came back and rebuilt that.

But so they were prone to the attacks of the people. And we see here that we need to be reminded of this reality that the enemy of our work is always very near.

[18:10] It is not something that's way over there, but it's something that hears. And we see here what riled them up, if you will. They heard that the people of exile were building a temple to the Lord God of Israel.

Notice, and we can notice this in the silence that takes place by the time we get to this, they were not concerned that that small remnant of 42,000 people had moved back to the area.

What they did not want was the reconstruction of the temple and later on, the reconstruction of the walls. They were okay with the people being there as long as the temple wasn't there.

Now the reason we know that is because when they succeed in stopping and delaying the work of the temple, they leave the people alone so much that the people build nice houses, panel the inside of their houses, read the prophet Haggai, and they have really elaborately built homes and the people of the land aren't stopping them from building their houses because they don't care if you live here.

What they don't want is don't come here and bring the Lord into the equation. You can join us, but don't build the temple and don't build the walls.

[19:16] See, make no mistake about it, the enemy before us and the enemy around us has no problem with us. The problem arises is when we begin to do the work of the Lord and that is why Scripture says we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against the powers and principalities of the air and spiritual forces of darkness.

It is because when we set our hands and our mouths and our feet and our bodies to do His work and to labor, then the opposition comes. You make yourself a home in the land, they leave you alone.

The enemy is not so concerned about our presence, but they are concerned about the presence that we try to introduce among them. That is why we don't find opposition until we completely sell out to the Lord God Almighty and we say, Here I am, Lord, use me if you will.

And we surrender ourselves to Him and then the attacks begin coming. We should not be surprised by that because of the proximity of the enemy.

Number two, we notice the profession of the enemy. It is a tactic that the enemy has used over and over again, has used it since the Garden of Eden and we should not be surprised by it.

[20:28] Notice what the enemy does. It says, When they heard this, verse 2, They approached Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' households and said to them, Let us build with you.

You remember when Nehemiah was faced with similar opposition. Tatiana and all those others wanting them to go down to the valley of Ono. I love that, by the way, because I cannot think of a better name for valley than Ono because Nehemiah said, Oh no, I won't go to Ono because I can't go down there.

So that's the only reason I can remember. All these people came. You remember what they said. They said, Let us build with you. Nehemiah said, It's not for you to build with us.

The enemy here, prior to that, same tactic being used. The enemy's coming. What do they say? Let us reconstruct the temple with you. The enemy always comes and tries to hinder the work by doing the work alongside of us.

We don't have time to go through the history of it, but if we were to take time just to look at Christian history and church history, and we would see the various ministries that the church knew were theirs in the early stages of church, and the church cared for the sick, cared for the dying, cared for the orphans, cared for the widows, and eventually, the enemy came and started doing the work alongside the church and working with the church, and then before you know it, don't you believe it, the church gave that work over to the world, and now there is no longer a presence of anything called Christianity among many of those ministries because they have simply been carried on by the world, and sometimes, one of the most dangerous things, I'm not decrying every parachurch ministry, sometimes one of the most dangerous things that can ever happen is when the church or the people of the Lord allow the people of the land to do the work alongside them because they eventually give it over to them.

[22:18] You don't know how many universities, by the way, some of the most prestigious universities across this country were started as Christian institutions. My favorite book, Martin Lloyd-Jones, Preaching and Preachers, that I recommend giving to every preacher.

Do you know how that book was written? Probably not. It's a series of Yale lectures where Martin Lloyd-Jones gave lectures at Yale University on what preachers should do.

Those things don't happen anymore. We gave it up. We let them take it because we worked alongside of them.

Well, maybe if we can bring them alongside of us, maybe then we can influence them. And I'm not saying this to be a doom and gloom guy, but far too often, if we're honest, friend, what fellowship has light with darkness?

And what we find out is the darkness seems to have a lot more impact over the light than the light does on the darkness. And what we find here is this reality where the enemy comes in and says, let us rebuild with you.

[23:21] And we notice what Zerubbabel and all those with him say, no. You're not going to build with us. But notice their profession says, we want to build with you for we too.

It sounds so good, right? Let us build with you for we, like you, seek your God. Now those are powerful words. For we, like you, seek your God and we have been sacrificing to him since the days of Esarhad and king of Assyria.

By the way, that's not a complete lie. That's a half truth. And if you do your study, you would go back to the book of 2 Kings. 2 Kings chapter 17, I believe it starts in verse 23 and goes about verse 34.

2 Kings 17, verses 23 through 34. And it's when the northern kingdom fell and the Assyrians and the Assyrians had repopulated remember I told you it's important. They repopulated that land because the northern kingdom of Israel has fallen and Esarhad brings people in and he leaves them there and the people of the land said we don't know the God, lowercase g, of this land and the lions keep killing us and we don't know what to do.

We're afraid and Esarhad says I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll get one of the priests from the people we carried away. That's a red flag. Wave that red flag right now because a priest from the people we carried away.

[24:33] What nation was carried away? It was the northern kingdom. Were there any Levites or priests from the descendants of Aaron in the northern kingdom? Shake your head. No because no there weren't. What were those priests of? They were the priests of the golden calves that Jeroboam just decided anyone wanted to be a priest you can be a priest.

But Esarhad said I'll find a priest send him back your way and he will tell you how to worship the God of that land. So from the very beginning their worship was tainted by the choice of Jeroboam and the sin of worship in the golden calves and so then we find the people of that land in 2 Kings 17 they say okay so they just added it to their plethora of other gods and they began to worship the true God and worship the false gods and just covering all their bases so that the lions wouldn't eat them.

Now that's sacrificing out of fear that's not sacrificing out of love and worship and adoration so guess what they were not like them seeking the Lord God.

They were afraid lions would eat them so they said if I have to put a sacrifice on the altar to keep the lions away I'll put a sacrifice on the altar to keep the lions away but that does not mean that they had the testimony of being in a covenant relationship by the way they do not use the covenant name of God they use the name Elohim the general name because they were not under the covenant with him so rightly did Zerubbabel in the heads of the father's house so say no matter what you profess you have no business being with us.

My friend I hope you understand and we don't say this judgmentally we say this being wise as serpents but gentle as doves not everyone who proclaims to know Christ as savior knows Christ as savior and we have a good ground to stand on because Jesus says many will say to me that day Lord Lord did we not and Jesus says I will look at them and say I never knew you depart from me you workers of wickedness so be careful be careful who you even try to do spiritual work alongside of I always say this be careful who you read be careful who you study be careful what bible studies you go through be careful of those things because they absolutely do matter they do I've bought books and read the first couple chapters and thrown them away I've bought books for the sole purpose of throwing them away from good will I have bought them because I knew they were wrong and throw them away as I was walking out so that no other

[27:10] Christian would buy them I have done that I don't mind doing that why because false doctrine does great harm no matter what they profess see the profession of the enemy third you see the proximity of the enemy you see the profession of the enemy look at the persistency of the enemy you think well they said you have nothing to do and they used the name King Cyrus right they said we have nothing to do with you we're going to build this temple we're going to do it look at what it says 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 look at this as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us so they had good ground to be there they had this reality they said we're going to build we have a royal commission to build we have a right to be here leave us alone they invoked the name of the king of the land by the way the king was their king too the enemy who was opposing them was also under the realm of King Cyrus the problem is is that Cyrus was four months away by journey and even though they invoked the name of the king of the land they say we have a right to be here the enemy doesn't stop we would like to think as long as we say well we have permission we're doing what we're supposed to do leave us alone we would like to think that the enemy stops but look they don't verse four says then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and frightened them from building and hired counselors against them to frustrate their council all the days of Cyrus king of Persia even until the reign of Darius the king of Persia it's ten plus years that they hold them up they are persistent they didn't take no for an answer and to emphasize the persistency is why

Ezra introduces us into verse six how they did it again at a latter date and he talks about they did it during the reign of Ahasuerus they did it during the reign of Artaxerxes they were doing it when Cyrus was king they continued to do it while Darius was king they did it even while Camasus was king they did it through the reign of Ahasuerus and even the reign of Artaxerxes what he is telling us his friend listen to me when you fight the fight with the enemy it's not a one and done it's a battle that has to be fought over and over and over again Nehemiah is a wise man and Nehemiah I'm sure when people show up and say let us build the walls with you Nehemiah probably says well I've

heard this before I've read about this my friend Ezra the priest told me this happened once before when they were building the temple no you're not going to build with us guess what you're going to start holding me up in the court of law aren't you and they tried to do the same thing don't be surprised when the enemy just keeps coming and keeps coming and keeps coming one of the greatest harms that we ever do is when we have won the victory we think and then we let our guard down thinking that we okay we can just move on that battle is done and that's generally not the case this is why we're told to take on the full armor of

God and having done all to stand therefore because the enemy is a persistent enemy the only time they stop is when we get to the fourth thing the power of the enemy notice how powerful the enemy can be the power of that enemy is found in that last verse we read verse 24 the last verse of the chapter then because they held them up look at what it says that they did in verse 5 or in verse 4 they discouraged them they frightened them they hired counselors against them to frustrate them they did all this they just kept on and kept on and kept on and all these things though they had the approval of the court of law the court of the land king Cyrus they did all these things and since they were doing all these things just holding it up sending letters and hiring counselors and the world just had all these resources look what it says in verse 24 then work on the house of God in Jerusalem ceased the enemy was powerful enough to stop the work it ceased and we think well that's no small feat well you had a small remnant 42,000 people but you had 42,000 plus people whose hearts were stirred that were called to do the work 42,000 people whose hearts were stirred to leave behind and to sell everything 42,000 people that also took up an offering from the people that remained back in the

Persian Empire that were funded 42,000 people who were able to make the journey rebuild the altar to start the sacrificial system to spend the time collecting all the resources and collected resources for months and gathered together laid the foundation stones people that had given of their resources and of their riches people who had funded them they had the articles of the temple that were given to them by King Cyrus that were ready to go back into the temple they knew what they were called to do and then in a moment they stopped stopped the power of the enemy stopped them in their tracks and they all went home started building their houses planting their gardens scattering their seed and just started living life why because in our own ability the enemy is strong enough to make us stop doing what we know we're called to do and think about it for just a moment anyone's ever had any calling and by the way every believer in

Jesus Christ has a calling upon their life and how easy it is to get discouraged in that and to get upset and to get down hearted and to get frustrated in it and just to say never mind forget it I'll do it and if I'm just being transparent with you I don't know how many times I said I would do anything but preach I'll do anything but pastor it's not that I don't love the church it's not that I'm not appreciative of it but at any time I never ran from my calling I knew God was calling me to do that but I would be lying if I said there have not been a number of days where I said you know what it would be awesome to go back to where I checked in at work at seven o'clock and I got off at four o'clock and I went home and that was it and if my phone rang it was because a boss was telling me a pole got broken I could say sorry not tonight and hang back up that would be just pretty sweet that was sweet life back then so I thought I mean every one of us have done that every one of us no matter what we're called to do maybe we've been called to pray for a friend and we get discouraged when we're praying or maybe we're called to we know the Lord is nudging us and calling us and you need to read your word more and all of a sudden as soon as you get started you feel so discouraged and you get so upset and you give up because it's just so hard it seems like the time's not there anymore it can be any of those things any of those things it's easy because the enemy that is so persistent and keeps stealing the time and holding us up in the court of law so to say makes it so easy and they are so much more powerful than us because it seems like their resources are endless and they had the funds to keep hiring all these counselors until they finally just said you know what it's enough

[34:38] I'm going home and they stop for 10 plus years they stop next time we're together we'll look at the book of Haggai and we'll see how wonderful that was for them how when they planted gardens it didn't rain and how they scattered much seed and they only gathered in a little bit and how though they thought they would make money the money seemed to fly away like birds and they had no resources and though their houses may have been paneled on the inside their cupboards were bare as well and

though the sky was beautiful looking it would never drop a rain and the ground was as hard as stone and they could do nothing and then finally God says I'm not going to bless you because no matter how powerful the enemy is there is one one thing that is greater than the enemy that always seems to move the people of God back to do what they're supposed to be doing and that is the word of God they were at a standstill until the word of God came to them through Haggai and Zechariah and then they started working guess what the enemy was still there the enemy was still present the enemy hadn't stopped he didn't remove the problems when the word came the problems didn't stop when the word came the circumstances weren't any better when the word came it didn't get any easier but the word now carried authority and it carried greater authority than the enemy that was opposing them and what we find over and over and over again is that our discouragement and our calling comes when we begin to focus on ourselves and when we commit ourselves to be back into the word of God and we let the

God of the word speak to our hearts and minds then we say woe is me if I do not do what he's called me to do the most dangerous thing that we can ever do when we give up and we go home as we set our word aside do you know why and I've told you this before I make it my habit to be back in the office on Monday to be reading scripture again it's not because I'm upset at anybody it's not because I'm discouraged at the church it's not because I haven't feel loved I want you to understand that it's because even in the midst of the most loving congregation any pastor could ever have you're still fighting a spiritual battle you still understand it when you stand up the reality of eternity rests in the balances for people who are before you and you are discouraged there is discouragement about that people say well how do you not get discouraged pastor you want me to tell you how it's because the very first thing I do is I go back to the word and I just start reading the word again and I get back in it and I start studying it and it always speaks to my heart and it always speaks to my situation and I say yes okay this is the Haggai and Zechariah and our hearts and mind this is the fitting we don't have to wait this is the wonderful news about this as powerful as the enemy is to stop us in our work we don't have to wait 10 years for a prophet to walk up and knock on our doors and say what are you doing because I promise you time and time and time again every time I open up the Bible he looks at me and says what are you doing I said you know what Lord you're right we have the full counsel of God's word right here before it's more powerful than the enemy who opposes us and it is absolutely 100% accurate and it speaks to our situations I know you've noticed it no matter what you're going through it seems like the word of God has a fitting word for you it's living and active we get it testimonies abound people going through things wrestling with things and they just open up scripture and boom there it is because God speaks through his word to overcome the discouragement of the enemy friend don't be discouraged by the enemy as they were don't wait 10 years to fulfill your calling as they were because I can promise you just like the rest of the chapter says they're just going to keep going and keep going let the enemy do what the enemy does it'll be exciting when we get to the rest of this they start rebuilding the temple the enemy still running their mouth and they said that's okay you go ahead and talk we have a commissioning from the word Nehemiah is rebuilding the wall the enemy says we're going to write letters and Nehemiah says go ahead write your letters that's fine I'm going to rebuild the wall what is it I'm going to focus on what I'm called to do let the enemy do what he does I'm just going to do what I've been called to do and come what may let it come we have a conviction of calling and so we stand beside him and Ezra chapter 4 verses 1 through 5 and in verse 24 thank you my brother thank you