

Intro: Anytime you do a great work for God there is going to be opposition.

Not EVERY difficulty or struggle is the result of spiritual opposition, sometimes it is just life!

But you can be guaranteed that when you stand up and Say,

“I’m going to do a great thing for God, there WILL be opposition!”

Because of that I have titled today’s message: “It’s Never Easy!”

Remember what we are doing in this series. We are learning from the Israelites return from Captivity, and taking the lessons we learn from them and applying them to where we are as we prepare to return

Today we are going to look at a time frame that covers over 100 years in the life of the nation of Israel!

As we do that I want to look with you these events from two very significant viewpoints.

Then, once we have this overview we are going to extract 4 very important action points for where we are

Two Viewpoints: The Great Return...and the Great Opposition

1. The GREAT RETURN! 1:1-2 *God has appointed me*

First, The reality: This return from Babylon isn’t a one time, pack it all up, everyone home free!

The “return” stretches out over more than 100 years, touches 5 or 6 bible books...Prophets/Priests...

Understand the Setting

In chapter 1-2 the children of Israel were released from captivity in Babylon, and returned to PL

Over the next 100+ years there was a “rolling return”: 3 waves of people returning

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| • Led by Zerubbabel | 50k | Restoration to Land | 1:2 |
| • Led by Ezra | 2k | Reformation of Heart | 7:6 |
| • Esther: | No return | Protection of People | Book |
| • Led by Nehemiah | No Number given | Reconstruction of Walls | Book |

Applic: KEY: God is doing an amazing work of grace. He is fulfilling the promises He made to His people and allowing them to return to the Promised Land, to rebuild the Temple, and to rebuild the walls of city. All along the way He is protecting them and providing for them!

BUT: Along with the Return...Every step of the way...they experience Great Opposition.

Every single one of these leaders faced an uphill battle to do what God called them to do

It Was Never Easy!

2. The GREAT OPPOSITION! 3:1-3 *“despite their fear”*

The opposition came to them in the same way it comes to us. From every side...Every Way...All Time

When you read these three books, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, the opposition is unending! LOOK

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| • Internal Doubts | 3:3 | <i>“despite their fear”</i> |
| • Personal Disappointment | 3:12 | <i>“many wept aloud when they saw foundation”</i> |
| • External Discouragement/Frustration | 4:4 | <i>“people set out to discourage them!”</i> |
| | <i>To weaken</i> | <i>To Cause to tremble</i> |
| | | <i>To Break them down!</i> |
| • Defamed Character: | 4:12-16 | <i>“Dishonor you, Not pay, Rebel, Nothing Left”</i> |

That is the way the enemy attacks...Every direction!

When you say, I’m going to serve God. I’m going to lead my family, I’m going to love my spouse, I’m going to teach my children to love Jesus, I’m going to be a witness for Christ at work, home, school I’m going to go to church weekly, join a group and attend, break a sinful habit in my life...

You Will experience Opposition!

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” 1Pe 5:8

Love what Rick Warren used to say: *“You are not being paranoid if they really are out to get you!”*

So, What Do We Learn From Those Who Have Returned Before Us?

SO WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR OUR RETURN TO WORSHIP?

WHAT DO WE LEARN? WHAT ACTIONS SHOULD WE TAKE?

4 Very Important Actions We have to Take Daily!

- **Don't Be Discouraged:**

~I hear people say all the time...God must not be in this, because it is way too hard!

~If God were a part of this, leading this, supporting this, then it would be easier. NOT TRUE

~Every single leader involved in leading the people back to the land: WHICH WAS GOD'S WILL

~They all experienced opposition; We looked at Zerubbabel, True of Ezra, Esther, Nehemiah

~All of them had the same challenge. It came in different forms...but...Opposition came

Action #1: Don't be Discouraged

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." Heb 12:2-3

- **Don't Be Deterred:**

~When opposition comes it is very easy to be deterred, sidetracked and start down the wrong path

~I was talking with a friend of mine on Tuesday as I was working on this sermon, asked? Preaching?

~I told him, *I'm talking about the naysayers, the second-guessers and the underminers!*

~That is what you see with Ez, Neh, and Esther! For well over 100 years each of these leaders Challenged

~But here is the KEY: Not one of them allowed it to deter them from What God Called them to do!

~We have to be the same way. We can't become so caught up in the opposition that we stop!

Action #2: Don't be Deterred:

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Ga 6:9

Here is the Key: When you are doing something great...important...easy to be deterred by others, and their agenda. What we have to do is know where we are going...

Define our "WIN" and GO THERE

Jesus did that: Luke 9:51

~And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, KJV

~NIV As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

- **Don't Be Distracted:**

Distractions come in all shapes and sizes. The Evil One is endlessly creative in trying to get us off target Just look at what happened to Jesus in the wilderness.

~Temptations: Power, Fame, Personal Needs Anything to keep Him from His ministry

~Struggles: Personal issues, Circumstances, Needs of others...Legitimate and Illegitimate

Remember when Jesus walked away from healing some people Not distracted

Remember when one of the 12 Judas betrayed Him, Loved Him, kept going Not distracted

Remember when closest friends let Him down in the Garden...Sleeping while He prayed: Kept

Illus: One of the other Pastors preaching in this series is probably going to cover it, but Nehemiah

"And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" (KJV) 4 X Same Reply!

- **Don't Be Deceived:**

Sometimes we think...It will be OK. I'll just do what I need to do, keep my head down...No waves

Stay under the radar. I won't bother anyone...and they won't bother me! NOT TRUE!

You and I are engaged in spiritual warfare...For our families, or friends, relatives, neighbors, city

We cannot abdicate the responsibility God has charged us with...if we try...we lose everything!

That is one of the main lessons of the book of Esther: Remember the story? Jews destroyed Esther

Her uncle/mentor: Esther 4:14

"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

Key: No good way to say it: You are going to get shot! That you cannot change! No one unscathed!

Your choice is...Do you get shot lying down...running away...or moving forward! God is able!!!!

CONCL: Here is my conviction: Our church is HERE...For such a time as this! God trusted US

This time is unprecedented...and we as people of God: People of FAITH...NOT people of FEAR

Don't be Discouraged: Don't Be Deterred Don't be Distracted Don't be Deceived

We have the opportunity to *"be ready to give a reason for the hope we have within us!"*

This week...when that opportunity comes...rise to the occasion...Share God's love and hope