

# KINGDOM WORK

Week Two | May 5, 2019 | Kingdom Workers Overcome Opposition

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's texts, Ezra 4–6; 1 Corinthians 15:58; James 1:25; and 1 John 5:4. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God has called us to be overcomers.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

Our identity gives us the courage to work well in adversity.

### MEDITATE

*"Be it known to the king that we went to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God. It is being built with hugh stones, and timber is laid in the walls. This work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands" (Ezra 5:8).*

## GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

We were created for good work (Ephesians 2:10). God's design for our lives has always involved us working. While our culture may see work as a means to an end, we know it is more than that. No matter what we do, we

do it to God's glory (1 Corinthians 10:31). We are citizens of His kingdom, and we engage in kingdom work. We work "heartily, as for the Lord and not for men" (Colossians 3:23). We serve Christ in all our labors. When we go to our jobs in retail, we work for the Lord. As we train our children in our homes, we do it heartily for God. We serve Jesus as we contribute in our weekly staff meetings. There is no separation between the secular and the sacred. There aren't "ministry" jobs and "regular" jobs. Kingdom work is being accomplished on all fronts around the world. We work in the spheres in which God has placed us. We are kingdom workers and our work matters to God.

As we will learn in this week's text, our work matters not only to God, but also to Satan. He is our enemy in our work. God gave the Israelites in Ezra's day the job of rebuilding His temple. He freed His people from captivity and sent them back to Jerusalem with supplies from their captors to do this work. They got so far as the laying of the foundation when opposition arose. Our text today begins with the adversaries of the Jews. We will see their wicked schemes and aggression to sabotage the rebuilding of the temple. We will even see them succeed in stopping the work. But like Satan, these adversaries do not get the final say. They cannot thwart the plans of God. Their victory is short-lived. With a little help from the prophets, the people courageously continue their work in the face of opposition. Why? Because God made them overcomers.

Scripture teaches that though we will have tribulation in the world, we are to have courage, for our God has already overcome the world (John 16:33). And as His children, we, too, are overcomers. "For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world" (1 John 5:4). We prevail because of who we belong to. "Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Our identity declares us overcomers. We are united with Christ. We are God's children. The Holy Spirit dwells within us. We overcome the world. We overcome opposition to our kingdom work.

Our enemy aggressively seeks the destruction of God's agenda. He wants to destroy our efforts to advance the kingdom of God. But because of who we are, we cannot be overcome by our enemy. "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). Our identity is magnificent. Yes, we will face opposition to what we do, but we do not live in defeat. God has declared us victors. He has made us overcomers. Our identity gives us the courage we need to work well when our work is opposed. We have a powerful identity. We have work to do. Let's get to work for our King.

**Q:** *When you experience opposition to your work, do you act like an overcomer or do you give up? Share examples.*

**Q:** *How does believing your identity as an overcomer give you courage to do the work God has given you to do?*

## ▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

In today's lesson we will learn, based on our identity in Christ, how to overcome opposition to our work.

1. KINGDOM WORKERS EXPERIENCE OPPOSITION
2. KINGDOM WORKERS PERSEVERE WHEN OPPOSED
3. KINGDOM WORKERS WHO PERSEVERE PROSPER IN ALL THEY DO

## GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

## KINGDOM WORKERS EXPERIENCE OPPOSITION

### ▣ EZRA 4:4-6, 21-24

**Q:** *How did the Israelites' adversaries oppose their work?*

**Q:** *Were their efforts successful?*

It's been seventy years since the original temple built by Solomon was destroyed. An entire generation of the people of God have been born into and lived their whole lives in captivity. But now they are free and commissioned to return home to rebuild the temple. People who have only heard from their parents what Jerusalem was like finally get to experience it for themselves. While the older saints wept at the lack of splendor of this new temple, surely they also cried for the sweetness of this long-awaited homecoming. The foundation

has been laid, but there is still much work to be done.

The Jews had adversaries who opposed their work. “The people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem” (Ezra 4:4–6). They were committed in their opposition, attempting to derail the rebuilding of the temple almost the entire time it took to build it (535–516 B.C.). Know this—our enemy is serious in his commitment to our destruction. He doesn’t merely dabble in frustrating our work, he zealously opposes it.

The opposers to the work had many tools in their arsenal to get the Israelites to stop rebuilding the temple. They discouraged and threatened. They bribed city officials. They falsely accused and slandered the Jews to the Persian king. Basically, they were bullies. They sought to intimidate the Jews into submission. They got the king (who reigned in the time of Esther) on their side by convincing him that the Jews desired to rebel against him. He commanded that the work be stopped (Ezra 4:21). The opposers used “force and power” to make them cease working (Ezra 4:23). This was approximately two years after they had begun their work (Ezra 3:8).

The work did not resume until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia (Ezra 4:24), the year 520 B.C. For fifteen years, the opposition held and the work ceased. Fifteen years of walking past the foundation with no structure on top of it. Fifteen years of dealing with the smug comments of the opposition. Fifteen years of wondering why God had brought them to Jerusalem to rebuild His temple only for the work to be shut down in year two. Fifteen years living in the tension of believing they had let their God down. That’s a long time to suffer opposition. A long time to doubt their identity.

Can you relate to their struggle? Do you feel the tension of knowing God has called you to a work, but being opposed to the point of feeling ineffective? You are not alone. Thousands of years ago, these recently returned exiles walked in this tension too. Opposition does not equal failure or that you’re doing it wrong. On the contrary, when our kingdom work is opposed, it usually means we’re doing something right. The devil hates what we’re doing for our King. He’s committed to stopping it. It may even appear, like it did in Ezra’s day, that he’s won. But looks can be deceiving.

Kingdom workers will experience opposition, but the King has declared us overcomers. We can’t lose to our enemy because our King has already defeated him. His victories are our victories. We prevail in the end. This truth gives us the confidence and the courage to trust our King when our work is opposed. Our King will crush our enemy. He gets the final say. And one day, He will say to all His kingdom workers, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:23). Christian, you’ve got a job to do. Get to work.

- Q: *What other examples do we see in Scripture of saints whose work was opposed by Satan?*
- Q: *Can you share an example of how the enemy has attempted to frustrate your work? How does Matthew 25:23 encourage you to courageously continue in the face of opposition?*

## KINGDOM WORKERS PERSEVERE WHEN OPPOSED

### ■ EZRA 5:1–2 AND 1 CORINTHIANS 15:58

- Q: *Why did the people resume their work of rebuilding the temple?*
- Q: *Why should we be steadfast in our work?*

Ezra chapter 4 ends on a somber note. The work God had given the Israelites to do had been successfully opposed. The people of God spent the next fifteen years defeated. The enemy rejoiced at his supposed victory. But victory does not belong to the devil. It belongs to our great God and King! He intended for His work to continue and sent His servants, the prophets, to stir them up to do it. “Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God were with them, supporting them” (Ezra 5:1–2). God’s children were down, so He sent people to speak His Word over them. See the power of God’s Word. It works in us (1 Thessalonians 2:13). For fifteen years the Jews did not do the work God sent them to accomplish. Then God’s Word was spoken to them by the prophets and they “arose and began to rebuild the house of God.”

God provides what He requires. He wanted His people to rebuild His temple, but they lacked courage to do so in the face of opposition. He surrounded them with grace as He spoke to them, empowering them to persevere. The devil

succeeded in making them afraid to work. God reminded them that they were not powerless against the enemy. He equips us with the full armor of God to stand against the devil's schemes (Ephesians 6:11). They just needed to put it on.

Kingdom work will be opposed by our enemy. But kingdom workers persevere in opposition. Persevering is not glamorous. Often, it's accompanied by heartache, humiliation, and severe trials. And if we keep our eyes on the opposition, victory feels impossible. We need a better vision. We need a vision of Who we work for. We need a vision for what He promises His faithful workers. "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12). This crown of life is for all the persevering saints. Perfect fellowship forever with Jesus is our reward. Can you imagine this? An eternity reigning with Christ—this is our reward. Do you anticipate it? Does this vision of your future glory motivate you to persevere in trials? May it be so.

When affliction comes to your work, be patient (Romans 12:12). When you are confused by what is happening in your work, trust in the Lord (Proverbs 3:5). When you feel your work is unimportant and unnoticed, "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Dear kingdom worker, you are an overcomer. Know your identity. Claim it. Live it. Do not retreat in your labors. Persevere. The Lord is with you and has declared in His Word that you are an overcomer. Keep working, dear saint!

🕒: *What encouragement can we find in Scripture to help us persevere in our kingdom work?*

🕒: *What habits can you develop to stir your heart to long for future glory?*

## KINGDOM WORKERS WHO PERSEVERE PROSPER IN ALL THEY DO

📖 EZRA 6:14–15 AND JAMES 1:25

Q: *What did the elders of the Jews do?*

Q: *What happens to the person who perseveres?*

The people got back to the work of rebuilding the temple. Spurred on by the counsel and support of their leaders, they had the courage to persevere. Their opponents did not sit idly by. They confronted the Israelites (Ezra 5:3–4) and sent a letter to Darius king of Persia. They told him, “this work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands” (Ezra 5:8). “And the elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia; and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king” (Ezra 6:14–15). The enemies of the people of God had to watch them prosper. This work prospered and was finally completed.

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). Our Father is for us and for our prosperity. But we must rightly understand what He desires for us in our prospering. We limit our understanding of prosperity to financial gain. Scripture doesn’t teach that if you obey, then you will be rich. Some of the dearest saints in church history were among the poorest in their regions. Prosperity is about much more than money. It also means to flourish, to thrive. God wants His people to flourish, to grow in a healthy and Christ-like way. We flourish when we’re faithful to Him. True flourishing cannot be obtained outside of obeying the will of God. We may find success and money, respect and fame, but we will only flourish when we do what He tells us to do. When we persevere in faithfulness, no matter the opposition. The Bible speaks blessing to those who persevere. “He will be blessed in his doing” (James 1:25).

Seventy years after the original temple was destroyed, it was rebuilt. Can you picture the celebration of the former exiles? They dedicated the new house of God and offered sacrifices of bulls, rams, lambs, and goats (Ezra 6:16–17). They observed the Passover (Ezra 6:19). “And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the Lord had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that He aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel” (Ezra 6:22). They celebrated with the joy the Lord gave them. They celebrated that the same God who had made them joyful had turned the heart of the king of Assyria in their favor. They were freed from captivity and were worshipping once again in the temple of God. The Israelites were prospering. While they were afraid of locals who wrote letters to the king, their God controlled the heart of that king. God’s people were free to flourish.

Kingdom workers who persevere prosper in all they do. Because God makes them. God gives us work to do and

promises that though we experience opposition in it, we can trust Him to make us overcomers. This truth gives us the courage we need to persevere and continue our work. Take courage, kingdom worker. May your work prosper in your hands.

🕒: *What examples do we find in Scripture of saints whose work prospered? How does this encourage you in your work?*

🕒: *How do you think God desires you to prosper in your work?*

## NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

🕒: *How does knowing that God's plans for you include your true flourishing give you courage to do the work?*

🕒: *Do you believe God has made you an overcomer? How do you live out your identity as one who overcomes the world?*



## PRAY

+ Use this prayer point to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.

*Father, praise Your name! You turn the hearts of kings. You have plans for me to prosper in my work. You promise that I will be blessed in what I do when I persevere. You say my work is not in vain. You equip me with armor to oppose the devil's schemes. You make me joyful. I bless You for Your goodness to me. Forgive me for my lack of trust in You when I cower to my enemy. Make me strong, Lord, for Your name's sake. Make me prosper for Your glory in all the earth!*

## COMMENTARY

**EZRA 4:6** – This verse jumps forward to later events during the reign of Ahasuerus (reigned 486–464 B.C.), otherwise known as Xerxes, who appears in the book of Esther (cf. Esther 1:1).

**JEREMIAH 29:11** – God's plans for the exiles is welfare (Hb. *shalom*), not evil, or "calamity." Having sought Babylon's *shalom*, the exiles will receive God's *shalom* in the form of a future and a hope in their homeland.

*\*All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes.*

