

Ezra Lesson 4

Ezra Chapter 4

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Introduction:

Ezra Chapter 4 covers the opposition the Jews faced as they rebuilt the temple.

I. The Adversaries Oppose the Rebuilding of Temple

Ezr 4:1 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel;

Ezr 4:2 Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither.

Ezr 4:3 But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us.

As the reconstruction of the Temple became evident to the neighboring peoples (Samaritans and neighboring gentiles), they came Zerubbabel and the chief fathers offering to join together in a cooperative effort and help. We have here a clear and developing example of biblical ecclesiastical separation.

These were the Samaritans who were not scriptural in their worship of God. These people were involved in idolatry along with a professed worship of Jehovah. They were spiritual compromisers through and through. They were the half Jew, half gentile stock which had been settled in the northern kingdom after the Assyrian deportation in about 722 B.C. (See II Kings 17:24).

2Ki 17:24 And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.

The response of Zerubbabel and Joshua was essentially, no thanks. "But we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us." Zerubbabel demonstrated a clear example of biblical separation from apostasy. He would not cooperate with those walking outside of the instructions of the scriptures.

Ezr 4:4 Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building,

Ezr 4:5 And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Spurned (not on personal grounds, but by scriptural principle), “the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building.” Though not specifically recorded, they evidently threatened the workmen, sought to interfere with the delivery of material from Lebanon, and generally opposed the project. The opposition “hired counselors against them.” (The thought is how they apparently retained attorneys to file petitions and injunctions against the project.

In short, they went to court to try and stop the work. This went on throughout the remainder of the reign of Cyrus who evidently ignored them. It continued with his successor however, who unfortunately was negatively influenced against the Jewish remnant. The greater picture is so typical of Satan and how he works. He will find any method to undercut and oppose God’s work.

These people had a vision to do God’s work. Successful people always have determination about them. Warren Buffett once said “The difference in successful people and very successful people is that very successful people say NO to most everything. While he was speaking of world success in investing, it is true in our service to God. These Jews could have used the other help and made their job easier, but they said “No”. We will build the temple God’s way. We need to lead disciplined lives. Living a disciplined life is the strongest form of Self-Love.

II. The Letter to King Artaxerxes

Ezr 4:6 And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they unto him an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

Ezr 4:7 And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue.

Ezr 4:8 Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort:

Ezr 4:9 Then wrote Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, and the Elamites,

Ezr 4:10 And the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Asnappar brought over, and set in the cities of Samaria, and the rest that are on this side the river, and at such a time.

In verse 6, mention is made of Ahasuerus. This likely is the king of Persia otherwise known as Cambyses. The Artaxerxes of verse 7 is likely the same individual. Actually, the name Artaxerxes is more of a title given to Persian kings than a name similar to the title of Caesar of the later Romans.

Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort: The enemies of the Jews therefore filed a formal complaint with this new king making "accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem." Various notables joining party to the suit are noted. Also mention is made how the letter was written in Syrian (the common language of the region).

This later would become the Aramaic language which was the everyday language of Jesus' day in Israel. The reference to Samaria is the first post-restoration mention made thereof. It refers to the inter-racial peoples who have existed north and east of Jerusalem and who were so notable in Jesus' day.

The mention of "this side of the river" is an idiom referring to the lands west of the Euphrates river. The Asnapper mentioned probably is Sennacherib of biblical reference or possibly Ashurbanipal, either of whom were Assyrian kings.

2Ki 17:24 And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof.

Ezr 4:11 This is the copy of the letter that they sent unto him, even unto Artaxerxes the king; Thy servants the men on this side the river, and at such a time.

Ezr 4:12 Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations.

Ezr 4:13 Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings.

Ezr 4:14 Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the king;

Ezr 4:15 That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed.

Ezr 4:16 We certify the king that, if this city be builded again, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river.

The letter of complaint was filled with distortions and outright dishonesty in making allegations against the Jews. It simply was not true. Apart from calling them “rebellious and bad,” the allegation of them rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem was an outright lie. The allegation of rebuilding the wall had powerful political and military implications.

A city wall in ancient times was a major military defensive system and could allow a city to revolt politically. The Samaritan enemies further alleged if the work proceeded, the Jews would cease to pay their incumbent taxes thus damaging “the revenue of the kings.” They sanctimoniously went on to hypocritically claim they did not want to see the Persian king dishonored. (The truth is, they probably detested him.)

They advised the Persian king to make a search of records and note how the Jews in the not-too-distant past had been a thorn in the side of the Babylonians. (This was true under the final Judean kings Jehoiachim and Zedekiah. See II Kings 24:1,20; 25:1,9.)

It is always good to seek things out and prove things. They saw what was truth. Sandra Carey said “Never mistake knowledge for wisdom. One helps you make a living, and the other helps you to make a life.” We need Godly wisdom to know how to live a life pleasing in the Lord’s sight.

III. The King Orders the Work to Cease

Ezr 4:17 Then sent the king an answer unto Rehum the chancellor, and to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their companions that dwell in Samaria, and unto the rest beyond the river, Peace, and at such a time.

Ezr 4:18 The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me.

Ezr 4:19 And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein.

Ezr 4:20 There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all countries beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them.

Ezr 4:21 Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me.

Ezr 4:22 Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?

Then sent the king an answer unto Rehum the chancellor, and to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their companions that dwell in Samaria, and unto the rest beyond the river, Peace, and at such a time. The letter was received by the king of Persia. He ordered a search be made of the historical archives of Babylon. He learned of the past problems with the kingdom of Judah as they struggled to maintain their independence from Babylon.

He perhaps learned even of David and Solomon, their power, and their notable successors. He therefore issued an order for the Jews in Jerusalem to cease and desist in rebuilding the city until further orders were received from him. He may have been sincerely deceived. In any event he was mainly interested in his political base and tax revenues.

Ezr 4:23 Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power.

Ezr 4:24 Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions. They went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease all preparation and building by force and power. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

When the decree from the king arrived back in Samaria, the Samaritan leaders, Rehum and Shimshai the scribe along with subordinates, rushed to Jerusalem and forcibly caused the work to stop. Sadly, Satan had hindered God's work. The Temple project would remain in abeyance for approximately fourteen years.

It would be wise for the saint to remember that Satan couldn't have hindered in any way if it isn't within the permissive Will of God along with divine purpose.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be blessed.