

Ezra 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; Ezra 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.

Ezra 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.

Some of the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the people that had returned to Jerusalem were rebuilding the temple to the LORD God of Israel. Representatives came to meet with Zerubbabel and some of the chief leaders of the people, declaring that they wanted to help them build the temple. They stated that they also worshipped and sacrificed to “your God” and had done so since Esarhaddon was king of Assur, the man responsible for bringing them to the land.

Verse 10 indicates that the primary antagonists were from Samaria. JFB offers the following insight: “A very interesting explanation of this passage has been recently obtained from the Assyrian sculptures. On a large cylinder, deposited in the British Museum, there is inscribed a long and perfect copy of the annals of Esar-haddon, in which the details are given of a large deportation of Israelites from Palestine, and a consequent settlement of Babylonian colonists in their place. It is a striking confirmation of the statement made in this passage. Those Assyrian settlers intermarried with the remnant of Israelite women, and their descendants, a mongrel race, went under the name of Samaritans. Though originally idolaters, they were instructed in the knowledge of God, so that they could say, ‘We seek your God’; but they served Him in a superstitious way of their own.”

Zerubbabel and Joshua, along with the chief elders of Israel, refused their help, declaring that they would do it themselves as commanded by Cyrus king of Persia.

Again, JFB makes astute observation: “This refusal to co-operate with the Samaritans, from whatever motives it sprang, was overruled by Providence for ultimate good; for, had the two peoples worked together, familiar acquaintanceship and intermarriage would have ensued, and the result might have been a relapse of the Jews into idolatry. Most certainly, confusion and obscurity in the genealogical evidence that proved the descent of the Messiah would have followed; whereas, in their hostile and separate condition, they were jealous observers of each other’s proceedings, watching with mutual care over the preservation and integrity of the sacred books, guarding the purity and honor of the Mosaic worship, and thus contributing to the maintenance of religious knowledge and truth.”

Ezra 4:4 Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of

Judah, and troubled them in building,

Ezra 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.

“weaken the hands” – an idiom meaning to discourage

The people of the land responded by discouraging and intimidating them. They even hired people to work against them and frustrate their building efforts throughout the duration of the reign, until Darius became the king of Persia.

Ironsides made a good application: “Men talk glibly of serving the Lord and having made a start for the kingdom, who know nothing of repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Till such are brought to self-judgment before God, and heart-confidence in Christ as Saviour, they are only a hindrance to any Christian company, and will be adversaries to everything that is really of the Holy Spirit.”

Ezra 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.

Beginning with this verse through verse 23 it seems that the writer gets sidetracked in thinking about the continual adversity the people encountered in rebuilding the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

At the beginning of the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes), the enemies of the people of Israel wrote him a letter making accusations against those living in Judah and Jerusalem.

Note: Ahasuerus is the king that made Esther his queen.

Esther 2:16–17 “So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.”

Ezra 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.

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

Ezra 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,

Ezra 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.

Even though they got no response from Ahasuerus, the enemies of the people of Jerusalem did not give up. When Artaxerxes became king, they wrote him a similar letter in the Syrian (or Aramaic) language, declaring to be a unified opinion of several nationalities represented west of Euphrates.

Ezra 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.

Ezra 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.

Ezra 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.

Ezra 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;

Ezra 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.

Ezra 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 facts as set forth in the letter included:

- Jerusalem had a history of being a rebellious and bad city.
- It was being rebuilt by the captives that had been allowed to return.
- If this was allowed, the people would not pay toll (personal tax), tribute (excise tax on articles consumed), or custom (travel tolls), thereby reducing revenue to the king.
- Because we are your servants, we do not want to see you dishonored.

They then suggested that the king search the royal records, confident that he would see that they verified that the people of Jerusalem had a history of being rebellious. In fact, that is why the city was destroyed originally. They implied that if Jerusalem were rebuilt, he would end up losing control of the lands west of the Euphrates.

Guzik helps clarify the situation in reference to verse 12: "This indicates that the work they complained against was not the work of rebuilding the temple, because that work was already completed. This was resistance to the work of rebuilding the city and its walls. We know that the temple was completed sooner rather than later for several reasons. One is that the same Zerubbabel who started the work also saw it finished (Zechariah 4:9). Another is that some of the same people who saw the glory of Solomon's temple also lived long enough to see Zerubbabel's temple finished (Haggai 2:3)."

Zechariah 4:9 "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you."

Haggai 2:3 "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?"

Ezra 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.*

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

Ezra 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.*

Ezra 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.*

Ezra 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.*

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

The king answered their letter, noting that the letter they had sent had been clearly read to him. He informed them that the search they had recommended had been made and verified what they had written. He noted that in the past the kings of Jerusalem had been powerful enough to demand tribute from the surrounding nations. He then authorized them to command that work on the city be stopped until he ordered differently. He urged them not to fail in enforcing his command since it could result in harm to the king.

Ezra 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.*

Ezra 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.*

Once they received the king's response, the enemies of the people of Judah couldn't wait to go show it to the Jews and enforce their compliance.

So the work on the temple was stopped until the 2nd year of the reign of Darius, King of Persia.

Another good observation from Ironside: "So it ever is, the world and the world-church are quite content to see Christians prospering in temporal ways. The line of demarcation soon goes down when riches increase and self-interest prevails. It is the spiritual prosperity, the energy of faith that offends the world; for when the light shines brightly, it exposes the selfishness, the pride, the hypocrisy of those who have a name to live but are dead."