

Ezra 4 New American Standard Bible

Enemies Hinder the Work

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, ² they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' *households*, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for like you, we seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here." ³ But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of 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 for the Lord God of Israel, just as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, has commanded us."

⁴ Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building, ⁵ and bribed advisers against them to frustrate their advice all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

⁶ Now in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

⁷ And in the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of his colleagues wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the text of the letter was written in Aramaic and translated *from* Aramaic.

The Letter to King Artaxerxes

⁸ Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes, as follows— ⁹ Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their colleagues, the judges and the lesser governors, the officials, the secretaries, the men of Erech, the Babylonians, the men of Susa, that is, the Elamites, ¹⁰ and the rest of the nations which the great and honorable Osnappar deported and settled in the city of Samaria, and in the rest of the region beyond the *Euphrates* River. And now ¹¹ this is a copy of the letter which they sent to him:

"To King Artaxerxes: Your servants, the men of the region beyond the *Euphrates* River; and now ¹² let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem; they are rebuilding the rebellious and evil city and are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations. ¹³ Now let it be known to the king, that if that city is rebuilt and the walls are finished, they will not pay tribute, custom tax, or toll, and it will be detrimental to the revenue of the kings. ¹⁴ Now because we are in the service of the palace, and it is not fitting for us to see the king's shame, for this reason we have sent *word* and informed the king, ¹⁵ so that a search may be conducted in the record books of your fathers. And you will

discover in the record books and learn that that city is a rebellious city and detrimental to kings and provinces, and that they have revolted within it in past days; for this reason that city was laid waste. ¹⁶ We are informing the king that if that city is rebuilt and the walls finished, then as a result of this you will have no possession in *the province* beyond the *Euphrates* River.”

The King Replies and Work Stops¹⁷ Then the king sent a response to Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their colleagues who live in Samaria and in the rest of *the provinces* beyond the *Euphrates* River: “Peace. And now, ¹⁸ the document which you sent to us has been translated *and* read before me. ¹⁹ And a decree has been issued by me, and a search has been conducted and it has been discovered that that city has risen up against the kings in past days, and that rebellion and revolt have been perpetrated in it, ²⁰ that mighty kings have ruled over Jerusalem, governing all *the provinces* beyond the *Euphrates* River, and that tribute, custom tax, and toll were paid to them. ²¹ Now issue a decree to make those men stop *work*, so that this city will not be rebuilt until a decree is issued by me. ²² And beware of being negligent in carrying out this *matter*; why should there be great damage, to the detriment of the kings?”

²³ Then as soon as the copy of King Artaxerxes’ decree was read before Rehum and Shimshai the scribe and their colleagues, they went in a hurry to Jerusalem to the Jews and stopped them by military force.

²⁴ Then work on the house of God in Jerusalem was discontinued, and it was stopped until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

We will use five tools on our expedition that are built around five questions

1. What questions were provoked within you?
2. Did anything confuse you?
3. Did anything move you emotionally?
4. Did God instruct you to do something?
5. Did you gain any insight into God’s character?

Pauls observations and insights

1. Israel always had enemies because good will always be at war with bad.
2. Our enemy will sometimes be in direct opposition to us but sometimes they will scheme and deceive.
3. The leaders recognise their deceptive trickery and refuse to get drawn in.
4. Sometimes the only way we can defend ourselves against our enemy is to separate from them.
5. Israel’s plan to rebuild the walls of the city and the house of the Lord was their underlying focus, distraction was to be deceived.
6. They had been given a mandate by the king.
7. Fear drove the people to pull back from the focus and to stop building.
8. Why is fear such a powerful enemy?

9. They had been given authority to act and yet they had stopped the work.
10. Israel's enemy wrote to the king and complained so as to sabotage the work on the walls.
11. All the important people signed the letter. Did this give more authority to the letter?
12. Jerusalem had a reputation of being a rebellious city and this worked against Israel.
13. The enemy had declared to the king that the city refuses to pay taxes and the kingdom would suffer.
14. They wanted the kingdom treasury to prosper not diminish.
15. Did Jerusalem have a reputation for being a rebellious city?
16. Any king is reluctant to lose grip on any land governed by him.
17. The king commands the work to stop.
18. Having got the news, Israel's enemy rushes around and forces the work to stop.