

Ezra 04 - Opposition to Rebuilding Temple; The Samaritan Letter to Artaxerxes to Stop Jerusalem Construction

I. Restoration of the Temple (Ezra 1:1–6:22)

(2) Rebuilding of the Temple under Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 3:1–6:22)

(B) The prophets Haggai and Zechariah encourage the rebuilding of the Temple that had been halted due to opposition from the people of the land (Ezra 4:1–6:22)

(a) Rejected people of the land opposed the rebuilding effort (4:1-24)

(i) Israel's leaders reject the people of the land who offer to rebuild the Temple (4:1-3)

(ii) The people of the land seek to discourage, intimidate, and frustrate the builders (4:4-5)

(iii) The people of the land criticize in letters the builders before various Persian kings (4:6-23)

(a) Before Ahasuerus (4:6)

(b) Before Artaxerxes (4:7)

(c) Rehum, Shimshai successfully attain an injunction from Artaxerxes halting the rebuilding effort (4:8-23)

(1) Accusers (4:8-10)

(2) Accusation of rebellion against Persia (4:11-16)

(3) Artaxerxes' answer (4:17-22)

(4) Rebuilding halted (4:23)

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The Rebuilding Opposed

Ezra did not record all the events in those 21 years (from 536 BC) until the temple was finished (515 BC). That is because he was making a theological point that the temple of the Lord was completed despite opposition that might have stopped any other project.

The temple was the basis for the post-exilic community's fellowship with God. It was not until the temple was rebuilt could the people really live in accordance with the Mosaic Law. Ezra's account of this interim period differs in tone from Haggai's account of opposition (from 520 to 518 BC). Ezra did not dwell on the sinful condition of the people as they lived in the land as did Haggai (Haggai 1). Ezra's account focused on external pressures from the surrounding peoples, whereas Haggai focused on the internal attitudes of the people who valued material possessions above spiritual things (Haggai 1:4-6).

Ezra 4

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- (a) Rejected people of the land opposed the rebuilding effort (4:1-24)
 - (i) Israel's leaders reject the people of the land who offer to rebuild the Temple (4:1-3)

1 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,

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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;

- "...the enemies" - the Assyrian government had previously encouraged its residents to move to Israel and to settle there, after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC. This was official government policy from 680-630 BC (Cf. 2 Kings 17:24; Ezra 4:10).

— These non-Israelites worshipped pagan idols (2 Kings 17:30-31), but they also started worshipping Yahweh, whom they regarded as the god of the land in which they now lived (2 Kings 17:32-33).

— Eventually they intermarried with the Jews who had remained in the land and their descendants became the Samaritans, a mixed breed racially and religiously. The exiles who returned from Babylon and their descendants despised these people (Cf. Luke 10:30-37; John 4:9). It was these people of the land who approached Zerubbabel and offered to help the Jews rebuild their temple (v2).

- "...Judah and Benjamin" - these two tribes are mentioned in particular because they now constituted the majority of the nation, and it was largely in their old territories that the remnant now lived.

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."

2 they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' *households*, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we, like you, seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here."

2 they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of the families with this message: "Let's build along with you, because, like you, we seek your God, as do you, and we've been making sacrifices to him since the reign of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, who brought us here."

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.

- Isaiah had prophesied that the northern 10 tribes would cease to be a distinct people within 65 years. He prophesied this in 734 BC (Is 7:8), and it was fulfilled by 669 BC, within the reign of the Assyrian king, Esarhaddon (680–668 BC), who was responsible for transplanting foreigners into Samaria (2 Kings 17:24).

— Some people, however, had been displaced into Samaria earlier by the Assyrian kings Sargon II (722–705 BC) and Sennacherib (705–681 BC)

Judah and Benjamin's enemies were also appealing on the basis of the fact that they, like the Jews, were a "displaced people," having been brought in from the outside. In a sense they were downplaying the nation of Israel's "roots" in the land. Does this have a contemporary ring to it? Satan's tactics haven't changed! These foreigners intermarried with Israelites, and it was their descendants who now approached Zerubbabel saying, "We seek your God, as you do." This proposal was the more dangerous since it came under the guise of true religion (2 Cor 11:15; Cf. 2 Cor 6:17).

The "enemies" (called "the peoples around them," Ezra 4:4) were the descendants of these mixed peoples and the forefathers of the NT Samaritans. These people in Ezra's day claimed that they worshiped the same God, that is, YHWH, the God of Israel. But they had a syncretistic form of worship; they worshiped both YHWH and other gods (2 Kings 17:29,32-34,41). Therefore their statement (Ezra 4:2) was not fully accurate and was apparently was made to mislead the leadership of the returned band.

The enemies used two methods of opposition to try to keep the temple from being built. First they offered to help in the construction process, thereby hoping to infiltrate the ranks and sidetrack the building project. When that did not work, they frightened the builders (perhaps with threats on their lives) and even hired counselors to frustrate them (v4-5).

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."

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 to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us."

3 But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel replied, "You have no part in our plans for building a temple to our God, because we alone will build to the LORD, the God of Israel, in accordance with the decree issued by King Cyrus, king of Persia."

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.

- The response by the governmental side (Zerubbabel) and the religious side (Jeshua) was decisive and immediate. They had two reasons for not wanting to be sidetracked by this offer of help:

1. The temple was for the LORD the God of Israel, who was not the god these people worshiped
2. They were commissioned by King Cyrus himself to undertake the building project and therefore had every right to carry it out on their own

— Zerubbabel wisely realized that if their commitment to God did not include a commitment to obey His revealed will, the Jewish remnant could only anticipate endless disagreement, conflict, and frustration with them.

— While this may seem likely exclusivity and separatistic to us today, keep in mind that those who offered their "assistance" are identified as "enemies" (v1). Their motives were clearly subversive.

(ii) The people of the land seek to discourage, intimidate, and frustrate the builders (4:4-5)

4 Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building,

4 Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building,

4 After this, the non-Israeli inhabitants of the land undermined the people of Judah, harassing them in their construction work

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

- The fact that these people had no sincere interest in actually helping the Jews in their rebuilding project became obvious very quickly
- These Samaritans revealed their true character when, after further rejections, they build their own temple on Mount Gerizim (John 4:20-22)

PERSIAN KINGS OF THE RESTORATION PERIOD		
Kings	Reigns	Scripture
Cyrus II (the Great)	559-530	Ezra 1:1; 4:5
Cambyses	530-522	
Gaumata (pseudo-Smerdis)	522	
Darius I (son of Hystaspes)	522-486	Ezra 5—6; Haggai; Zechariah
Xerxes I (Ahasuerus)	486-464	Ezra 4:6; Esther
Artaxerxes I (Longimanus)	464-424	Ezra 4:7-23; chs. 7—10; Nehemiah; Malachi
Xerxes II	424-424	
Darius II (Nothus)	423-404	Neh. 12:22
Artaxerxes II (Mnemon)	404-359	
Artaxerxes III (Ochus)	359-338	
Darius III (Codomanus)	338-330	

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.

5 and hired counselors against them to frustrate their counsel all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

5 by bribing their consultants in order to frustrate their plans throughout the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia until Darius became king.

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.

- This policy of harassment continued on until the reign of Darius, king of Persia, who ruled from 521-486 BC

— This includes the remaining years of Cyrus (535–530 BC), the reign of Cambyses (530–522 BC), the short reign of Smerdis (522 BC), and until the second year of Darius I (521/520 BC)

— It was during his reign, in 515 BC, that the temple was completed (the account of the building program under Darius is resumed in v24, after a parenthesis in v6-23)

- The Persian officials were bribed to frustrate the plans of the returnees. Bribery was a well-known practice in Persian times.

Parenthetical Letters

These letters to and from Artaxerxes are out of place chronologically, but they follow here logically to show that the opposition Ezra had begun to describe (v1-5) continued on for many years—to 485 BC, the year Xerxes began to reign (v6) and on into the days of Artaxerxes (464-424 BC). Artaxerxes was the king who was reigning during the events recorded in Ezra 7-10. The letters may have been written at the time of Ezra's return (458 BC). Therefore the letters were written nearly 80 years later than the account into which they were placed. Ezra was not being deceptive by placing the letters here in his book since he clearly dated them by the ruler under which they were written. Anyone familiar with the history of that part of the world at that time (as were the inhabitants of Israel when the Book of Ezra was written) would have clearly seen what Ezra was logically doing.

(iii) The people of the land criticize in letters the builders before various Persian kings (4:6-23)

(a) Before Ahasuerus (4:6)

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

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

6 At the beginning of the reign of Ahasuerus, they lodged a formal accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

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.

– "...Ahasuerus" - also known as Ahasuerus, ruled from 486 to 464 BC. He was the man Esther married (Cf. Esther 2:17).

– "...an accusation" - the same root word in Hebrew as for Satan, "the accuser" (1 Chr 21:1; Job 1:6)

— Ezra recorded nothing of the nature or results of the accusation except that it apparently kept the Israelites from working on the building project. This verbal opposition in Xerxes' reign is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible.

— This verse sets the stage for the following letter which was written in the reign of Persia's next king. It also shows that the neighbors of the returned exiles continued to oppose them long after they had finished the temple rebuilding (in 515 BC).

(b) Before Artaxerxes (4:7)

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*.

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*.

7 While Artaxerxes was king of Persia, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their co-conspirators wrote in the Aramaic language and script to King Artaxerxes of Persia. Aramaic:

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.

– "...Ahasuerus" - the successor of Ahasuerus (Xerxes), who ruled from 464-424 BC).

Opposition against the Jews was strong during the time of Artaxerxes.

— Clearly, the incident reported in this letter took place long after the temple was completed. It really involved the attempt by Israel's enemies to halt the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its walls in the days of Nehemiah.

— Because the enemies' letter and the king's reply brought the work on the city walls and foundations to a halt, it seems logical that the letter was written before the return of Nehemiah, for under Nehemiah the building projects resumed and were completed.

– "...the text of the letter was written in Aramaic" - though the letter was composed by people who spoke a northwest Semitic dialect (like Hebrew) it was written in the Aramaic language (the trade language of the day).

— The writer evidently wrote all of Ezra 4:8—6:18 and 7:12-26 in Aramaic originally

- Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel were probably men from Samaria
 - (c) Rehum, Shimshai successfully attain an injunction from Artaxerxes halting the rebuilding effort (4:8-23)
 - (1) Accusers (4:8-10)
- 8 Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes, as follows—
- 8 Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes, as follows—
- 8 Governor Rehum and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter concerning Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes as follows:
- 8 Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort:
 - Rehum the commanding officer and Shimshai the secretary were probably Persians who were persuaded to write the letter to enlist the help of local Persian officials to appeal to Artaxerxes to issue an order to stop the work on the walls
- 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,
- 9 then wrote Rehum the commander and 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,
- 9 From Governor Rehum Shimshai the scribe The rest of their colleagues— Judges, envoys, officials, Persians, the people of Erech, the Babylonians, the people of Susa (that is, the Elamites)
- 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 Susachites, the Dehavites, and the Elamites,
 - In their introduction, Rehum and Shimshai tried to point out to King Artaxerxes that the participants in this opposition were from various parts of the world
 - The names in this verse are the senders of the letter, and all were leaders who the Assyrians had sent to occupy this region after Samaria fell in 722 BC
- 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

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 River. Now 10 and many other nations whom the great and honorable Osnappar deported and resettled in Samaria and in the rest of the province beyond the Euphrates River.

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.

- "...Osnappar" - an Aramaic form of Ashurbanipal (669-660 BC), the Assyrian king who succeeded Esarhaddon. He had evidently continued the policy of his predecessors by sending people from the places named into this region

(2) Accusation of rebellion against Persia (4:11-16)

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

11 this is the copy of the letter which they sent to him: "To King Artaxerxes: Your servants, the men in the region beyond the River, and now

11 This is the text of the letter they sent. To: King Artaxerxes From: Your servants, the men of the province beyond the Euphrates River.

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.

- "...Your servants" - the writers of the letter identified with the Persian king by noting that they were his servants. The letter itself is recorded in 4:12-16.

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.

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.

12 May the king be advised that the Jews who came from you to us have reached Jerusalem and are rebuilding a rebellious and wicked city, having completed its walls and repaired its foundations.

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.

- "...the Jews" - those who returned with Ezra in the second return in 458 BC

— This is the group that attempted to rebuild the walls of the city, having received permission from Artaxerxes in 458 BC to do so (Cf. 7:21)

- The opponents noted that the Jews were restoring the walls and repairing the foundations
- Their opposition was obviously not against the rebuilding of the temple, for it had been completed in 515 BC. The opposition was against an attempt to begin rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem which the opponents called that "rebellious and evil city" (Cf. v15,19).

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.

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 or toll, and it will damage the revenue of the kings.

13 May the king be further advised that if this city is rebuilt and its walls erected, its citizens will refuse to pay tributes, taxes, and tariffs, thereby restricting royal revenues.

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.

- They presented three reasons why Artaxerxes should withdraw the Jews' building permit:

1. They warned that the Jews would stop paying taxes when their project was complete, and this would cut back the king's revenues (v13).
2. This decline in income would hurt the king's reputation and cause him shame (v14).
3. If the Jews continued to rebuild a city that had a reputation for rebellion, their actions might encourage other people in other parts of the empire to revolt (v15-16).

— The writers urged Artaxerxes to check his records and he would discover that Jerusalem had been a rebellious city, and that is why it had been destroyed

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,

14 Now because we are in the service of the palace, and it is not fitting for us to see the king's dishonor, therefore we have sent and informed the king,

14 Now, because we are royal employees and are committed to preserving the reputation of the king, we have written to the king and have declared its contents to be true,

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;

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.

15 so that a search may be made 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 damaging to kings and provinces, and that they have incited revolt within it in past days; therefore that city was laid waste.

15 urging that a search may be made in the official registers of your predecessors. You will discover in the registers that this city is a rebellious city, that it is damaging to both kings and provinces, that it has been moved to sedition from time immemorial, and that because of this it was destroyed.

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.

- The complainers felt it was their patriotic duty to tell the king what was happening so that he could search the records and see that Jerusalem was a rebellious city, which is why it was destroyed in the first place

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."

16 We inform the king that if that city is rebuilt and the walls finished, as a result you will have no possession in *the province* beyond the River."

16 We certify to the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls completed, you will lose your land holdings in the province beyond the Euphrates River.

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 added that if the city of Jerusalem was fortified, the Jews would take back all the territory they had previously occupied and the Persian king would have no territory left in Trans-Euphrates. They claimed he would lose a huge portion of his empire.

(3) Artaxerxes' answer (4:17-22)

17 *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,

17 *Then* the king sent an answer to Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their colleagues who live in Samaria and in the rest of *the provinces* beyond the River: "Peace. And now

17 The king replied: To: Governor Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their colleagues living in Samaria, and the remainder living beyond the Euphrates River. Greetings:

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.

18 the document which you sent to us has been translated *and* read before me.

18 the document which you sent to us has been translated and read before me.

18 The memorandum you sent to us has been read and carefully considered.

18 The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly 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,

19 A decree has been issued by me, and a search has been made and it has been discovered that that city has risen up against the kings in past days, that rebellion and revolt have been perpetrated in it,

19 Pursuant to my edict, an investigation has been undertaken. It is noted that this city has fomented rebellion against kings from time immemorial, and that rebellion and sedition has occurred in it.

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.

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.

20 that mighty kings have ruled over Jerusalem, governing all *the provinces* beyond the River, and that tribute, custom and toll were paid to them.

20 Powerful kings have reigned over Jerusalem, including ruling over all lands beyond the Euphrates River. Furthermore, taxes, tribute, and tolls have been paid to them.

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.

- The king did search the archives and found that Jerusalem had been powerful at one time
— What an encouragement this must have been to Ezra's original readers to recall the years of David and Solomon and to know that even a pagan king acknowledged the sovereignty of their empire centered in Jerusalem

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.

21 So, now issue a decree to make these men stop *work*, that this city may not be rebuilt until a decree is issued by me.

21 Accordingly, issue an order to force these men to cease their work so that this city is not rebuilt until you receive further notice from me.

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.

- In his reply, Artaxerxes explained that, after doing some historical research, he concluded that it seemed best to temporarily halt the reconstruction process in Jerusalem, but only until he could determine a permanent solution to the problem

— In his reply the king actually strengthened the position of the Israelites by leaving open the possibility that their work might resume later by his permission. The final clause left the door open for the king to change his mind, as we find in Neh 2! Truly this was providential, for the laws of the Medes and Persians did not change!

— This, of course, happened under the leadership of Nehemiah about two years later, in 444 BC (Cf. Neh 2:8). It was the subsequent decree to permit the building of the walls that triggered Gabriel's famous prophecy in Dan 9:25.

Note again that neither the Jews' enemies, in their letter, nor King Artaxerxes, in his reply, make any mention of the temple, because both sides knew that the Jews had a command from Cyrus to rebuild that. They spoke only of the city as a city with walls and gates.

22 And beware of being negligent in carrying out this *matter*; why should there be great damage, to the detriment of the kings?"

22 Beware of being negligent in carrying out this *matter*; why should damage increase to the detriment of the kings?"

22 Be diligent and take precautions so that you do not neglect your responsibility in this matter. Why should the kingdom sustain any more damage?

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

(4) Rebuilding halted (4:23)

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.

23 Then as soon as the copy of King Artaxerxes' document was read before Rehum and Shimshai the scribe and their colleagues, they went in haste to Jerusalem to the Jews and stopped them by force of arms.

23 As soon as a copy of the letter from King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum, to Shimshai the scribe, and to their colleagues, they traveled quickly to Jerusalem and compelled the Jews to cease by force of arms.

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.

- The king put a temporary stop to construction of the city. When the Samaritans received Artaxerxes reply, they immediately forced the Jews to stop construction.
- It is clear that the Samaritans took full advantage of this decree, and even went to the extreme of partially destroying the walls that had been built and burning the gates (Cf. Neh 1:3)
- It was the news of this disaster that so shocked Nehemiah and forced him into mourning and prayer (Neh 1:3-4)
- We can date this decree at about 446 BC. This was the same king who, two years later (444 BC), changed this edict and allowed Nehemiah to return and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 2:1-9)
- However, the immediate result was a forced cessation of the building activity because the enemies used force to back up a legal document from the Persian king

(iv) The cessation of the rebuilding work (536 BC) until Darius' second-year in 520 BC (4:24)

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.

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

24 As a result, work on the Temple of God in Jerusalem ceased and did not begin again until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia.

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.

- The narrative now picks up where it left off after v5 (v6-23 is a lengthy parenthesis)
- The result of the opposition during Cyrus' reign was that work on the temple was suspended in 536 BC, after the workers had only completed the foundation. Construction did not resume until the second year of Darius (520 BC), 16 years after the people had returned to the land for the purpose of rebuilding the house of God.