

THE TOXIC LETTER. EZRA 4:6-24. 06/30/24. #07.

To King Artaxerxes from your servants, the men of the region beyond the River, and so forth: ¹²Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing its walls and repairing the foundations. ¹³Let it now be known to the king that, if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished. ¹⁴Now because we receive support from the palace, it was not proper for us to see the king's dishonor; therefore we have sent and informed the king, ¹⁵that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. And you will find in the book of the records and know that this city is a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, and that they have incited sedition within the city in former times, for which cause this city was destroyed. ¹⁶We inform the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the result will be that you will have no dominion beyond the River.

1. Doubtful decree

- a. Cyrus had sent the Jews back to rebuild the temple
 - a1. The decree of the king cannot be changed
 - a2. When the king dies, so does his decrees
- b. The king's blessing was not enough
 - a1. No one was in Persia to speak for the Jews
 - a2. There is always more opposition than support
- c. The enemies had sent a letter to King Ahasuerus (Xerxes, Esther's husband), but they received no reply
- d. Due to opposition, lack of resources, & shortage of willing manpower, the temple was not completed in the days of Cyrus
- e. When Artaxerxes I received the letter, he had no connection with Cyrus's decree
- f. Art. discovered that Jerusalem had a history of rebellion
 - a1. This dates to the time of Nebuchadnezzar
 - a2. After the Babylonian governor, Gubara, was killed, Neb. destroyed the temple & Jerusalem
- g. Art. does not send for any Jewish representatives to present their case before him
 - a1. He merely accepts the letter at face value
 - a2. His response was based on accepting the accusations of the enemies of the Jews
 - a3. He disregards Cyrus's decree & purposes
- h. The letter had the approval of Mithredath, a Persian governor, an Aramean scribe, & Elamite official
- i. There is no man, official, or document that can provide protection against evil (written in Aramaic)
- j. The Lord was in the process, but it took time to complete

2. The work stops

¹⁷The king sent an answer: To Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, to the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and to the remainder beyond the River: Peace, and so forth. ¹⁸The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before me. ¹⁹And I gave the command, and a search has been made, and it was found that this city in former times has revolted against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it. ²⁰There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all the region beyond the River; and tax, tribute, and custom were paid to them. ²¹Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me. ²²Take heed now that you do not fail to do this. Why should damage increase to the hurt of the kings? ²³Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease. ²⁴Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

- a. This is 50 years after the temple was begun & the Jews were starting to rebuild the city
- b. The Samaritans warned the king that the Jews would fortify Jerusalem & then stop paying taxes
 - a1. He would lose his lands "beyond the river" (the Euphrates River)
 - a2. The work on the temple did not resume until the second year of King Darius I
- c. The Jews had no recourse since the decree was final
 - a1. This did not mean that God was done with them
 - a2. Setbacks are not necessarily God shutting the door, but can be God testing our faith (Job)
- d. The walls of Jerusalem would not be finished until 450 BC, so there was still a long process to go (King Darius the Great died in 486 BC)

3. God oversees all

- a. From man's perspective, it may seem like God had abandoned the Jews
 - a1. The spiritual walk is a long arduous process
 - a2. The Jews had to keep focused & committed
- b. Many spiritual battles are difficult, full of obstacles (Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Gideon, Nehemiah, Peter, Paul, etc.)
- c. Eph. 6:11-12 the spiritual walk is described as a spiritual battle
 - a1. The battle is not over until we are home
 - a2. Gal. 6:7-9 important not to faint in the battle