

Lesson 8 Facing More Opposition

Key Themes in the Book of Ezra

- Yahweh's covenantal faithfulness and man's covenantal unfaithfulness
- Yahweh sovereignly and providentially works out his redemptive purpose in history despite human evil.
- Yahweh's intention for Israel for purity in worship and obedience to the law
- Yahweh's grace and mercy exceed his anger
- Sinful man's need for a changed heart

Background

Ezra 4:6-23 is a parenthetical digression inserted by the author. The events he refers to occurred over a long period of time which included a second and third return of exiles to Jerusalem and several different Persian Kings. The common theme throughout this digression is the continual opposition to the desires of the returned exiles in Jerusalem.

Aramaic was a close language to Hebrew. It was the used by both the Babylonians and the Persians as their international diplomatic language. Letters written by government officials throughout the Persian Empire were written in Aramaic.

A charge of withholding taxes was equivalent to a charge of treason.

The Royal Archives (record books) contained the history and accounts of the various peoples the Persians ruled.

King Ahasuerus: Ahasuerus is the Hebrew spelling for Xerxes. He is the Persian king in the book of Esther. Esther became his queen.

Key Words and phrases:

accusation Strong's H7855 "sitnah" an accusation, opposition or hostility.

Time Line Chart for Ezra

Chapter 4

4:1-5; 24events under Persia's King Cyrus 539-530 BC

4:6 events under Ahasuerus (Xerxes) 486-465 BC

4:7-23events under Artaxerxes I 465-424 BC

Read Ezra 4:6-23 (4:24 is to be read with 4:1-5)

1. In Ezra 4:4-5 we learned that Judah's enemies tried to stop them from rebuilding God's Temple by discouraging them and frightening them. According to Ezra 4:6 what did they do at the beginning of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) reign? Why do you think they did this at the beginning of his reign?

2. The letter writing campaign continued with the next King, Artaxerxes I, who came into power in Persia after Xerxes. He reigned from 465 BC to 424 BC. Many scholars feel that the author tells of 2 letters in verses 4:7-8. Both were written by government representatives and enemies of the exiles. According to Ezra 4:8-16 what did these officials tell the King (in the second letter) in order to try to persuade him to stop the rebuilding of the city and walls of Jerusalem? What is the 3 pronged appeal of Rehum's letter?

3. Summarize Artaxerxes I response in Ezra 4: 17-22. According to Ezra 4:19-20 the king found evidence of previous rebellion of the Jews in Jerusalem. See 2 Chronicles 36:10-13. Rehum's complaints against Israel remind us that our past sometimes lives on to haunt us. How can the enemy use the past to discourage us in our present walk with the Lord or in our service to Him?

4. What happened in Ezra 4:23-24 as a result of the enemy's letter to the king? Besides the king's decree, what other means did Rehum and Shimshai employ against the Jews?

Application: King Xerxes reigned from 486-485 BC and Artaxerxes I reigned from 465 BC -424 BC. How does the opposition the exiles faced under their reigns compare to the opposition under King Cyrus? See Ezra 4:1-6. How do you account for the perseverance and intensification of this conflict over such a long span of years? How were the exiles able to endure all of this?

Application: Throughout history the church has often found itself opposed by the world and various cultures surrounding it. Describe some of the attacks God's people and the church face today? How can God's people continue to faithfully serve God and build and expand his church in the face of these growing attacks and opposition.

