

## Ezra Chapter 4

**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;"**

“Adversaries”:  
From this point to the end of the Book of Nehemiah there is conflict.

(Compare 5:3-17). These were Israel’s enemies in the region, who resisted their reestablishment.

The enemy of God's people would try to stop the building of the temple. Noah had the same problem from the world around him when he was building the ark. Any person or group of people who decide to do something for God, will face opposition from the devil. In this particular instance, the devil was using the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin.

**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 Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither."**

“Since the days of Esar-haddon”:  
The descendants from intermarriages between Israelites and foreigners who were transplanted to Samaria by Esar-haddon, the king of Assyria from 680 to 669 B.C., now approached “Zerubbabel” and said:

“Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do”:  
Actually, (Isaiah in 734 B.C.), prophesized that the 10 northern tribes would cease to be a distinct people within 65 years (Isa. 7:8). Esar-haddon was responsible for the transplanting of foreigners into Samaria (2 Kings 17:24). This proposal was the more dangerous since it came under the guise of true religion (2 Cor. 11:15; compare 2 Cor. 6:17). The procedure by the Assyrians effectively stifled a nationalistic spirit and created a mixed religion.

“We do sacrifice unto him”:  
This false claim represented the syncretistic worship of the Samaritans, whose ancestry came from intermarriage with foreign immigrants in Samaria after 722 B.C. (compare verse 10). In the British Museum is a large cylinder and inscribed on it are the annals of Esarhaddon, an Assyrian king (ca. 681 – 669 B.C.), who deported a large population of Israelites from Palestine. A consequent settlement of Babylonian colonists took their place and intermarried with remaining Jewish women and their descendants. The result was the mongrel race called Samaritans. They had developed a superstitious form of worshiping God (compare 2 Kings 17:26-34).

This has been another weapon the enemy used from the beginning. The serpent was in the garden with Adam and Eve. The enemy will infiltrate the church any chance he can get. This was no different. He tried to join in the building to sabotage the work.

**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 a 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."**

"We ourselves": Idolatry had been the chief cause for Judah's deportation to Babylon, and they wanted to avoid it altogether. While they still had their spiritual problems (Ezra chapters 9 and 10), they rejected any form of mixed religion, particularly this offer of cooperation which had sabotage as its goal; (compare verses 4 and 5).

"King Cyrus ... commanded us": Compare Ezra 1:2-4 (ca. 538 B.C.). This note gave authority to their refusal.

The Bible is very plain in warning believers not to be un-equally yoked with unbelievers. It was good that Zerubbabel and Jeshua saw through their offer to help, and refused to let them help. Cyrus had not insisted on them helping, and they knew better than to include those of the world in building the temple to the LORD.

**Ezra 4:4 "Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building,"**

By threatening them, or by dissuading the workmen from going on. By endeavoring to hinder their having materials from the Tyrians and Zidonians, or money out of the king's revenues to bear the expenses as ordered (see Ezra 6:4).

The people of the land here, are speaking of Samaritans. They were a constant hindrance to the building of the temple by Judah and Benjamin.

Verses 4-5: Even though Cyrus had approved rebuilding the temple, the Jews allowed the political maneuvering of their neighbors to "frustrate their purpose". They faced opposition and discouragement from the Samaritans from the time they returned to Jerusalem in 539 B.C. until the reign of "Darius" (521 – 486 B.C.), a total of about 18 years.

**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."**

"Frustrate": This caused a 16 year delay (ca. 536 – 520 B.C.). As a refute, the people took more interest in their personal affairs than spiritual matters (compare Haggai 1:2-6).

"Darius": Darius ruled Persia (ca. 521 – 486 B.C.).

These counsellors were bought to side in against Judah and Benjamin. In our day, this hindrance would be things like not being able to get building permits, or something of that order. They were trying to make it as difficult as possible to keep the temple from being built. The temple would bring a unity of the people. This is one of the things their adversaries did not want to happen.

Verses 6-23: This section represents later opposition which Ezra chose to put here as a parenthetical continuation of the theme “opposition to resettling and rebuilding Judah”. He first referred to the opposition from Israel’s enemies under King Ahasuerus (a regal title), or Xerxes (ca. 486 – 464 B.C.), who ruled at the time of Esther (4:6).

This section is a parenthesis (a chronological stop in the action), that shows the sort of overall opposition the Jews continually faced during reconstruction. At (4:24), the specific storyline about the work on the temple resumes. “Ahasuerus”, also known as Xerxes, ruled from (486 – 464 B.C.).

“Artaxerxes” I was king from 464-423 B.C. He was the grandson of Darius and the son of Ahasuerus.

**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."**

“Ahasuerus” (485 – 465 B.C.), also called Xerxes I, is known from the Book of Esther. The mention of him marks simply that with the passage of time (from 535 B.C. in verses 1-5), the antagonism of the enemy had not cooled off. The word “accusation” is the same word in Hebrew as for Satan, “The Accuser” (1 Chron. 21:1; Job 1:6; Zech. 3:1). This written accusation to Xerxes (in 486 B.C.), is not referred to anywhere else in the Old Testament.

“Wrote they [unto him] an accusation”: The word translated “accusation” means “a complaint.” Satan, meaning “legal adversary” or “opponent” is a related term.

Many believe this Ahasuerus to be the same as Xerxes mentioned in the book of Esther. They were trying to turn him against the people that had been allowed to return to Judah.

(Ezra 4:7-23), then recounts opposition in Nehemiah’s day under Artaxerxes I (ca. 464 – 423 B.C.), expressed in a detailed letter of accusation against the Jews (verses 7-16). It was successful in stopping the work, as the king’s reply indicates (verses 17-23). Most likely, this opposition is that also spoken of in (Neh. 1:3). All this was the ongoing occurrence of severe animosity between the Israelites and Samaritans, which was later aggravated when the Samaritans built a rival temple on Mt. Gerizim (compare John 4:9). The opposition to Zerubbabel picks up again at (4:24 – 5:2), during the reign of Darius I, who actually reigned before either Ahasuerus or Artaxerxes.

Verses 7-8: Letter ... letter”: Two different words are used here. The first is an official document as opposed to a simple letter. The second is the generic term for letter. The context verifies the choices of two different terms, since two different letters are indicated.

**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."**

The time now moves to "Artaxerxes" day (464 – 424 B.C.), whose reign spanned the events of chapter 7 to the end of Nehemiah. The complaints to him, and their outcome, show not only the dogged persistence of Israel's enemies, but the uncertainty of a great king's patronage.

Artaxerxes was the one who later allowed Ezra to return to Jerusalem. During his reign, Nehemiah obtained a reversal of policy and went back to Jerusalem with his blessings (Neh. Chapter's 1 and 2). The "Syrian tongue" is the Aramaic language, the commercial language of the Fertile Crescent during the first millennium B.C. Not only is the letter of (4:11-16), written in Aramaic, but so also is the entire section (from 4:8 through 6:18).

This is speaking of them having an interpreter write this letter in the Syrian language to prove to the Syrians they were part of them. Part of the reason the building had slowed down, was because of the change of kings. The people of Judah would not know whether the new king still would help with the building of the temple or not. He would not remain king very long.

Verses 8-10: This portion contains an imposing list of people who opposed the work in Jerusalem. "Rehum" was the "high official" or chancellor who presided quite probably over a group of minor officials, and was directly responsible to the satrap, or to the Persian king if he was in fact a satrap. "Asnapper" is a reference to Ashurbanipal the great Assyrian king (668 – 626 B.C), who completed the transplanting in Samaria of peoples that Esar-haddon (verse 2), had played a major part in relocating. "The river" is the Euphrates River.

Verses 4:8 – 6:18: Since this section contains predominantly correspondence, it is written in Aramaic also (7:12-26), rather than Hebrew, generally reflecting the diplomatic language of the day (compare 2 Kings 18:26; Isa. 36:11).

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

This means the same letter as before; which, according to Jarchi, was sent in the name of Mithredath, Tabeel, and his company, and was edited by Rehum, master of words or sense, and written by Shimshai the scribe. But it was written rather in all their names.

Rehum and Shimshai were not Hebrews. They were not for the building of the temple. This Artaxerxes was easily swayed against Jerusalem.

**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,"**

Who all signed the letter; namely, the governors of the following nations.

"The Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, and the Elamites. Which were colonies from several parts of Chaldea, Media, and Persia. And were settled in the several cities of Samaria, as several of their names plainly show, as from Persia, Erech, Babylon, Shushan, and Elimais. Some account for them all, but with uncertainty. According to R. Jose these were the Samaritans who first were sent out of five nations, to whom the king of Assyria added four more. Which together make the nine here mentioned (see 2 Kings 17:24).

**Ezra 4:10 "And the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Asnapper brought over, and set in the cities of Samaria, and the rest [that are] on this side the river, and at such a time."**

“Asnapper”: Most likely another name for the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (ca. 669 – 633 B.C.).

“Set in the cities of Samaria”: The race of Samaritans resulted from the intermarriage of these immigrants with the poor people who were not taken captive to Nineveh (see note on verse 2; 2 Kings 17:24-41).

There is not much known about Asnapper. These are speaking of people, who were not of Judah and Benjamin. They would like very much to run them off, if they could and take this area for themselves. They were afraid of the temple being built, because it would give a permanence to the re-taking of the land by Judah.

**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."**

“Artaxerxes” (see note on verses 6-23).

“This side the river”: West of the Euphrates River.

These letters were for no other purpose but to stir up trouble between Artaxerxes and Judah.

**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."**

“Jews”: This name was generally used after the Captivity because the exiles who returned were mainly of Judah. Most of the people of the 10 northern tribes were dispersed and the largest number of returnees came from the two southern tribes.

“Rebellious and the bad city:” The choice of the word rebellious is important, because the Persian Empire was continually plagued with rebellions during the fifth century B.C., one notable one by Megabyzus of the Trans-Euphrates area. Jerusalem had a history of rebellions against foreign powers, such as those under Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:1), and Zedekiah (2 Chron. 36:13), and even as far back as during the reigns of Hezekiah and Manasseh (2 Chron. 32:33), in the days of the Assyrians.

It was not actually this king who had sent them. Cyrus was the king of Persia at the time they were sent to Jerusalem. The Jews had rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, and that is what they were reminding this evil king of here. They were not rebelling now, but doing what Cyrus sent them to Jerusalem to do.

Verses 13-14: This accusation is full of hypocrisy. They did not relish paying taxes either, but they did hate the Jews.

**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."**

And let it be seriously and thoroughly considered by him and his counsellors.

"That if this city be builded, and its walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom": Being able to defend themselves against the king's forces, sent to reduce them to their obedience. These words take in all sorts of taxes and levies on persons, goods, and merchandise.

"And so thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings; not only his own, but his successors": This they thought would be a very striking and powerful argument with him.

They were trying to get this new king to stop Jerusalem from building a wall of protection around it. The easiest way to get the attention of this new king was to appeal to the loss of money from taxation of this province. Of course, there had been no rebellion, but they were not bothered with facts. They were trying to help themselves and not the king of Persia.

**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 dishonor, therefore have we sent and certified the king;"**

Have posts under the king, to which salaries were annexed, by which they were supported, and which they had from the king's exchequer. Or "salt", as in the original, some places of honor and trust formerly being paid in salt. Hence, as Pliny observes, such honors and rewards were called "salaries".

"And it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonor": To see anything done injurious to his crown and dignity or to his honor and revenues, when we are supported by him. This would be ungrateful as well as unjust.

"Therefore have we sent and certified the king": Of the truth of what is before related; and, for the further confirmation of it, refer him to the ancient records of the kingdom, as follows in verse 15.

They are pretending to look after the interest of the king of Persia. They eat salt that he had provided, is perhaps what is meant by maintenance. They are pretending to be protecting the king's interest.

**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."**

“Book of the records”: An administrative document called a “memorandum” kept on file in the royal archives.

“This city destroyed”: A reference to Jerusalem’s destruction by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (ca. 586 B.C.).

The northern kingdom of Israel rebelled against the Assyrians (in 701 B.C.; 2 Kings 18:7), and Judah rebelled against the Babylonians (in 600 and 589 B.C.; 2 Kings 24:1, 20). The latter rebellion led to the destruction of Jerusalem. The Jewish people never rebelled against the Persians, because the Persians allowed them to worship the Lord.

Nebuchadnezzar had come against Jerusalem, because the LORD had turned him against His people. Their being unfaithful to God was what caused their destruction. The records would possibly show a rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar, however.

**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."**

As it formerly was, and now attempted, as they suggest.

"By this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river": The River Euphrates. Intimating that the Jews would not only shake off his yoke, and refuse to pay tribute themselves, but would seize on all his dominions on that side the river, and annex them to their own.

These evil men were trying to convince the king that he would lose all control over Judah, if he allowed them to continue this building program. These evil men were not really trying to help anyone but themselves. They believed, if the king destroyed Judah, they would be able to receive this land.

**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."**

This affair, upon examination, being found to be of importance, the king of Persia thought fit to send an answer to the above letter, which was doing them an honor, and gave them the power and authority they wished to have.

"And to the rest of their companions that dwelt in Samaria": In the kingdom, province, and cities of Samaria.

"And unto the rest beyond the river": The River Euphrates and the rest of the nations before mentioned (Ezra 4:9).

"Peace, and at such a time": That is, all health and prosperity.

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

The plural number is used, being now become courtly for kings thus to speak of themselves.

"Hath been plainly before me": By such that understood both the Syrian and Persian languages. The letter was written in the Syrian language, and the king being a Persian, it was necessary it should be interpreted and explained to him.

**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."**

"I commanded, and search hath been made": This was no simple routine order given to one person, but rather a major edict to a large group of people.

This evil king had received their letters, and believed what they had said. He looked in the records and saw where Jerusalem had rebelled against them. He had believed a lie.

**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."**

As David and Solomon; and the account of these they had in their records (see 2 Sam. 8:1).

"And toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them": As appears from the places referred to. And this served to strengthen the insinuation made to the king, that if these people were suffered to go on building, he would lose his tribute and taxes in those parts.

The mighty kings, spoken of here, could be David, Solomon, or Josiah. This was a true statement, that they did collect tribute. The remnant of the people in Jerusalem now was not large enough to be a threat to anyone, however.

**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."**

"Until another commandment shall be given from me" provided a glimmer of hope, for it made a policy review possible and with it, by the grace of God, the mission of Nehemiah (Neh. Chapter 2).



No small order for one or two workers, but rather the efforts of 50,000 were called to a halt. The king was commissioning a decree of great significance. The original language calls for the difference. This decree would not lose its authority until the king established a new decree.

He now gave orders that the building was to cease.

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

To put his orders into execution, and at once, without any loss of time, oblige the Jews to desist from rebuilding the walls of their city, which he was told they were doing, though a great falsehood.

"Why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?" Of him and his successors, to be deprived of their toll, tribute, and customs, and to have insurrections, mutinies, and rebellions, in the dominions belonging to them.

They were to act immediately upon this, so the king would suffer no loss.

**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.**

"Letter": Another official document, as opposed to a generic letter, came from Artaxerxes, transfer of authority to the regional leaders to establish the decree. Without the king's official administrative correspondence, the decree could not be established.

It appears that these two men were the representatives of the king in this land. Even though the Jews had been freed and returned home, they were still under the rule of Persia. These men were speaking for the king of Persia, and forced the building to stop.

**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."**

Ezra picks up the narrative about the rebuilding of the temple from 4:5. The opposition against this work was so intense that the Jews "ceased" construction for a period of time. Eventually, work resumed in 520 B.C. And the temple was completed (in 515 B.C.; 6:15).

"Ceased ... unto the second year": For 16 years, from 536 B.C. to 520 B.C., work on rebuilding was halted.

This verse does not continue the previous discussion (verses 7-23), but picks up the thought of verse 5, going back to the time of Zerubbabel, and finishes with the same phrase (as in verse 5).

"The reign of Darius king of Persia": Two items mentioned were not addressed (in verses 1-5):

- (1) The work was not only hindered but halted;
- (2) The year of Darius (521 – 484 B.C), in which the deadlock was broken was (520 B.C.; compare Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1), or about 15 years later.

Artaxerxes reigned for less than a year. He was replaced by king Darius. Darius would allow the work to continue on as originally planned. This speaks of a period of less than 2 years interval, before the work on the temple would be legal to start again.

### **Ezra Chapter 4 Questions**

1. The enemy of God's people will try to stop the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Who did Noah have difficulty with, when he was building the ark?
3. Any person, who decides to do something for the LORD, will have trouble from the \_\_\_\_\_.
4. In this particular situation, the devil was using the adversaries of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
5. What did these adversaries ask Zerubbabel?
6. Why did they want to join the building force?
7. Who answered their request?
8. What was the answer?
9. Who had commanded the building of the temple?
10. The Bible is very plain about believers not being \_\_\_\_\_ yoked with those of unbelief.
11. Who weakened the hands of the people of Judah?
12. Who are the people of the land in verse 4?
13. Why were the counsellors hired?
14. Why did they not want the temple built?
15. In the reign of \_\_\_\_\_, they wrote accusations against Judah.
16. Who wrote the letter to Artaxerxes?
17. Who were the chancellor and the scribe that wrote a letter?

18. Why were all of these people so opposed to Judah and Benjamin?
19. What was the purpose of the letters?
20. Who had the Jews rebelled against in the past?
21. What reason do they give this evil king for stopping them from building?
22. How did the king answer Rehum and Shimshai?
23. Who were the mighty kings mentioned in verse 20?
24. What did the king tell them to do?
25. How long did the work on the house of God cease?