

d. Reigns of Xerxes and Artaxerxes 4:6 - 24

1. Complaints made to Xerxes and Artaxerxes 4:6 - 10

6 [1 At the onset of the reign (*or, ascension to the throne*) of Ahasuerus,² a complaint was lodged by the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

7 In those days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam, Mithredath and Tabeel and their colleagues wrote a letter to king Artaxerxes of Persia, the text of which was written in Aramaic, which was then translated.³

8 Rehum the commissioner (*or, chancellor*)⁴ and Shimshai⁵ the scribe, wrote king Artaxerxes a letter, as follows,⁶ concerning Jerusalem:

9 From Rehum the commissioner (*or, chancellor*), Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their colleagues: judges⁷ legates (*or, envoys*), counsels, overseers⁸ the people of Erech⁹ and of Babylon, people of Susa, that is the Elamites,¹⁰ and all the other people whom the great and glorious Osnappar¹⁰ deported and settled in the cities of Samaria and in the rest of the province of Trans-Euphrates:¹¹

11 This is a copy of the letter they sent:

To king Artaxerxes: from your servants the people of the province of Trans-Euphrates; Greetings. 12 Be it known to the king that the Jews who came from your region¹² have arrived in Jerusalem, and are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city; they are completely restoring the walls¹³ and repairing the foundations.¹⁴

13 Be it known to the king that if this city is rebuilt and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute¹⁵ customs or toll to the royal treasury¹⁶ it will then be diminished.) 14 Because we are like residents of the palace (*or, because we are subservient to the king, and do not desire to have the king shunned, we send this letter as a means of informing*

1 A portion of chapter 4, verses 6 - 13 found in brackets is considered by many scholars to be an interpolation since it seems to interrupt the story of Ezra. These events, according to some scholars took place almost a century later.

2 Ca. 485 BCE. Ahasuerus is the Hebrew form of a Persian name Khshayarsha, Greek: Xerxes. No doubt Xerxes I who reigned until 465 BCE.

3 Literally: "and he wrote the letter written in Aramaic." The Hebrew indicates that the letter was transcribed, being written in Aramaic. Thus 4:8 - 6:18 are in Aramaic. Another concept is that the letter was written in Aramaic script and sent in that language. Either way 4:8 - 6:18 are in Aramaic, not Hebrew.

4 Literally: "Holder of a royal decree."

5 A rather common Akkadian name. He was no doubt a public official appointed to be a scribe.

6 In verses 9 - 11 there seem to be 2 or possibly 3 introductions to the letter concerning the accusation against the Jews of seditious intent. Some scholars feel that only verses 9 - 11 are an interpolation.

7 A Persian loan word *da tabhar* translated as "judges" by LXX. Josephus translates the word as "judges of the council."

8 A Persian loan word, *aphursites* which is often translated as "Persians."

9 Present day Warka in southern Babylon. LXX translates the word as "that is."

10 Possibly a corruption, thus, a variant of Ashurbanipal, the last Assyrian king.

11 Literally: "beyond the river." The entire region of Syria and Palestine was administered by a Persian governor or satrap.

12 Literally: "came up from with you."

13 The Hebrew word *qddr* usually is translated as "fence" according to some lexicographers. The phrase can be understood as finishing the project or possibly that it has begun. The Hebrew is not clear.

14 The Hebrew word could properly be translated as "sub-foundations."

15 An Akkadian loan word: a more or less voluntary gift. *mindah*. The sentence has 3 different words for taxes.

16 The word is a Persian root word which possibly means "in the end." It has also been translated as "revenue."

the king) it is not proper that we should see the king discredited and therefore we are sending this to advise the king, ¹⁵ that an examination of the records (*or, annals*) of your fathers be made. ¹⁷ You will discover among the records (*or, annals*) that this city is a rebellious city that has damaged the kings and provinces so that revolts were already begun in ancient times. Historically they have been carrying on sedition and it is because it was for that reason that the city was destroyed. ¹⁶ Therefore we advise the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls completed you will no longer have possession of the province of Trans-Euphrates.

a Letter of Artaxerxes to Rehum and Shimshai 4:17 - 22 = I Esdras 2:25 -29

¹⁷ The king sent this answer:

To Rehum the commissioner and Shimshai the scribe and the rest of their colleagues in the province of Trans-Euphrates: Greetings. ¹⁸ The letter you had sent has been read aloud, having been translated. ¹⁹ Pursuant to my order a search has been made and it has been found that this city from time immemorial has been guilty of insurrection against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been rife in it. ²⁰ Moreover Jerusalem has been ruled by powerful kings ¹⁸ who had authority (*or, control*) over the entire province of Trans-Euphrates, ¹⁹ to whom tribute, poll tax and land tax were paid. ²¹ I therefore issue a decree that these men are to desist. The rebuilding of the city is to be halted, awaiting a decree to be issued by me. ²⁰ ²² Be careful that you are not lax (*or, neglectful*) in this matter, lest there be additional detriment to the interests of the king.

3 Work Stopped at Jerusalem 4:23 - 24 = I Esdras 2:30

²³ As soon as the copy of king Artaxerxes decree was read in the presence of Rehum and Shimshai, and their colleagues they hurried to the Jews at Jerusalem and stopped them, using force, compelling them to halt. ²⁴ It was then that the work came to a standstill and remained suspended until the second year of the reign of king Darius of Persia

¹⁷ Cf. ANET 288, 563-564.

¹⁸ The verse seems to be unclear. Are the powerful kings: 1. In Jerusalem i.e. the Israelite & Judean kings? 2. Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian kings?

¹⁹ An unhistorical exaggeration since Jerusalem could hardly be thought of as ruling over Palestine and Syria.

²⁰ Many scholars feel verse 21 in a later interpolation. It does not appear in 3 Esdras 2:24.

<CHAPTER 5>

C. The Reign of Darius 5:1 - 6:22

1 The Temple Building is Begun 5:1 - 2

1. Haggai²¹ the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo²² prophesied against²³ the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem, having been inspired by the God of Israel.²⁴ 2 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak again started to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem; with the support of the prophets of God encouraging them.²⁵

2. Official Investigation of the Building of the Temple 5:3 - 5 = I Esdras 6:3 - 6

3 At that time Tattenai the governor²⁶ of the province of Trans-Euphrates and Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues came in a threatening manner, saying, "Who gave you authority²⁷ to rebuild this house and to complete this structure?"²⁸ 4 They²⁹ also asked them this, "What are the names³⁰ of the men who are involved with this building project?" 5 But God watched over the elders of the Jews because they were not forced to suspend their work while a report was being sent to Darius and then a written reply was being sent.

3. Report of Tattenai to Darius 5:6 - 17 = I Esdras 6:7 - 22

6 A copy of the letter which Tattenai the governor of the province of Trans-Euphrates and Shethar-bozenai and his colleagues the envoys³¹ who were in the province of Trans Euphrates, which was sent to king Darius: 7 The written message they sent the king was as follows:

To king Darius: many greetings (*or, peace*). 8 It must become known to the king that we went to the province of Judah³² and found the temple of the great God. It is being built with huge stones,³³ and wooden beams

21 The name is found frequently in cuneiform records as well as in Aramaic papyri. Literally: "the prophets Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo." Since elsewhere Haggai is always referred to as "Haggai the prophet" the change was deemed permissible. Cf. 6:14; Haggai 1:1. These prophets are mentioned several times in the Elephantine Papyri: Haggai 9 times; Zechariah 6 times.

22 In Cuneiform writings it is normal to call a descendant "a son of" harking back to one of the most distinguished ancestors. Iddo was a contemporary of king Abijah, 913 - 910 BCE.

23 Hebrew: *al* which can mean "against" or "about." If the Hebrew word is translated as "against" were there 3 revolts? 1. Haggai and Zechariah. 2. Sanballat and Tobiah. 3. Tattenai and followers.

24 Literally: "with the name of the God of Israel who was against them." The Hebrew word *lohon* could also mean "over them." Possibly this phrase is a gloss.

25 Was the misgiving of the people residing in the area (not those who were involved with the building itself) because of the building of the temple or was there some other basis for this misgiving?

26 In the past he was identified as Ushtannu, a Satrap of Babylon. Recent scholars feel he was a subordinate of Ashtanni, based on a Babylonian record 502 BCE. which speaks of Taat, governor of Eberoni. Whether he was the governor or the assistant governor remains a question for the present.

27 OTL: "a decree of authorization to build the house and finish its roofing."

28 LXX: *χορηγία* "supplies (as for a banquet or the stage)" So also in v. 9. Recent scholarship has determined that the Aramaic word *ushsharnd* means "material" or "equipment."

29 Aramaic: "we." "We told them..." So: LXX, Ethiopic and possibly the MT. RSV & NRSV: "They."

30 Literally: "who are they, the names." The translation of this verse is based on the LXX. Aramaic: "We told them the names of the men constructing the building."

31 Berkley & KJV translate *apharsachites*, an old Persian word by transliterating it. The word literally means "elders." The LXX reads the word as "investigators."

32 A subdivision of the province of Trans-Euphrates. MT adds in an apparent gloss: "We found in the city of Jerusalem the elders of the Jews building..."

33 Literally "stones of rolling" LXX: "choice stones." No doubt the meaning is large stones that must be rolled. Other scholars feel the word should be translated as "hewn stones."

reinforcing the walls;³⁴ and the work proceeds diligently and rapid progress is being made. 9 We inquired of the elders concerning this, asking them, "Who granted you authority to build this house and complete its roofing (*or, this structure*)?"³⁵ 10 Additionally, for your information, we inquired about the names, that we might record the names of the men who were in charge. 11 This was their reply,³⁶ "We are servants of the God of heaven³⁶ and earth, and we are rebuilding the house that was originally built many years ago. It was built and completed under a great king.³⁷ 12 But because our ancestors provoked the wrath³⁸ of the God of heaven, he handed them over into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who demolished (*or, razed*) this house and carried away the people³⁹ into exile in Babylon. 13 However, in the first year of king Cyrus of Babylon, the king made a decree that this house of God should be rebuilt. 14 Additionally, the gold and silver vessels originally from the house of God which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple that was in Jerusalem were brought into the temple of Babylon. These Cyrus the king released from the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered to someone whose name was Shesh-bazzar, whom he had made governor;⁴⁰ 15 Also he said to him, "Take these vessels, and deposit them in the temple which is in Jerusalem,⁴¹ and let the house of God be rebuilt on its original site.⁴² 16 This same Shesh-bazzar came and laid the foundations of the house of God which is in Jerusalem and it has been under construction from that time on for it is not yet finished." 17 Therefore, if it please the king, let a search of the royal archives be made to determine whether an order had been issued by king Cyrus for the rebuilding of the house of God in Jerusalem. Let the king convey his pleasure to us in this matter.

<CHAPTER 6>

4. *The Answer of Darius 6:1 - 12 = 1 Esdras 6:23 - 34*

1 Then king Darius ordered that a search be made in the buildings where the archives⁴³ were

34 Some scholars feel that having timbers between the stone may originally have been thought to be a means of strengthening the wall against earthquakes. JB: "The walls are of paneled wood."

35 Literally: "returned us the word."

36 Darius worshipped Ahura Mazda, the god of heaven. Here the response to the inquiry is that they (followers of Judaism) were the true servants of the God of Heaven.

37 I.e. Solomon who reigned ca. 970 - 931 BCE.

38 Literally: "to tremble violently."

39 I.e. the skilled and/or educated people.

40 Aramaic: *pehd*. "Prince," or "governor." Did he become a replacement for Zerubbabel? Cf. Haggai 1:2.

41 The word for temple implies a storage place within the temple building.

42 Literally: "in its place." A slight emendation reads "to rebuild it in its place as it was before. There seems to be a contradiction in this verse. 1. The temple is presumed to be standing. 2. The temple is being built.

43 Literally: "house of letters" or "house of documents." JB: "muniment rooms" The Aramaic clearly describes a room for

kept in Babylon. ² However it was found in the citadel in Ecbatana ⁴⁴ which is in the province of Media. A scroll was found on which the following was written: ⁴⁵

A memorandum: ³ In the first year of king Cyrus, the king issued this decree concerning the house of God in Jerusalem: "Let the house be rebuilt ⁴⁶ as the place for offering sacrifices and where burnt offerings may be brought; the base thereof is to be sixty cubits high ⁴⁷ and sixty cubits wide. ⁴ For every three courses ⁴⁸ of hewn stones there was to be a course of new timber. ⁴⁹ The cost is to be paid by the royal treasury. ⁵⁰ ⁵ Additionally, let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem be transported to Babylon, to be restored and returned to the temple which is in Jerusalem where these belong. These items are to be deposited in the house of God." ⁵¹

⁶ Now therefore, Tattenai, governor of the province of the Trans-Euphrates region, Shethar-bozenai and your colleagues, the officials of the province of the Trans-Euphrates region are to withdraw ⁵² from that place. ⁷ Allow the work in this house of God to take place; (*or, Do not interfere with the building of the house of God*): let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its original site. ⁵³ ⁸ Moreover, I hereby issue a decree concerning what you will do in providing assistance to the Jewish leaders so they rebuild the house of God. The expenses are to be paid promptly and in full ⁵⁴ through the royal revenue from the accrued revenues of the province of Trans-Euphrates so that the work will continue without fail. ⁵⁵ ⁹ They are to receive whatever is needed: young bulls, rams, lambs for burnt offerings for the God

archives which would be stored in a safe place.

44 Aramaic: *Achmeta*, Modern Hamalan which was the former capital of Media. Records show that Cyrus stayed in Ecbatana the first year as king of Babylon. Cf. JBL 65 pp. 249 - 275.

45 Cf. the Cyrus Cylinder II 30 - 36 which includes permission for rebuilding of temples of other gods.

46 Literally: "let a substructure for the house be built."

47 A Jewish cubit was 17.6 inches. A great cubit, cf. Ezekiel 41:8 was 20.57 inches.

48 An Akkadian word: *nadbak*.

49 So: LXX: A & B along with 2 Hebrew manuscripts *hadat* A hapax legomenon perhaps meaning "new."

50 Literally: "the royal palace." *bet malka*.

51 The Aramaic of the last sentence is unclear. Literally: "You will lay down in the house of God." Does this verse imply that these vessels had sustained some damage and were to be reconditioned, or imply that they are to be returned to the place where they belonged? The latter is no doubt what the writer meant.

52 The word literally means "be distant." It is also a technical legal term meaning: "the accusation is rejected." Cf. Elephantine Papyri. *rahiqin hwo min-tamma*.

53 The Aramaic is difficult to understand. This apparently took place early in the reign of Cyrus in an effort to gain good will on the part of the Jews toward him. A probable translation might be: "let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews alone for the work of the house of God; let them build that house of God upon this site."

54 So: LXX & Peshitta. MT: "that it may not be made to stop."

55 The Aramaic text is ambiguous. "Assistance to the Jewish leaders" could mean "work along with the Jewish leaders," which would be refused. It could also be translated as "do about the Jewish leaders." The last phrase, literally is: "so as not to make it cease."

of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, oil, as might be required by the priests in Jerusalem, -- let that be given to them day by day without fail, ¹⁰ so that they may offer pleasing sacrifices ⁵⁶ to the God of heaven and pray for the well being ⁵⁷ of the king and his sons. ¹¹ Also issue a decree that whoever alters this edict, ⁵⁸ a beam is to be pulled from his house and he is to be impaled on it, and his house will be made a public privy. ⁵⁹ ¹² May the God who has established his name to dwell there overthrow any king or people that will make any attempt ⁶⁰ to tamper with this edict or to destroy the house of God which is in Jerusalem. I Darius make a decree! Let it be carried out immediately!

5. Completion of the Temple 6:13 - 18 = I Esdras 7:1 - 9

¹³ Then, Tattenai, the governor of the province of the Trans-Euphrates region, Shethar-bozenai, and their colleagues, with dispatch sought to fulfill in a precise manner, the order sent by king Darius. ¹⁴ So the elders of the Jews progressed satisfactorily, ⁶¹ being assisted by the urgings of the prophesy of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They brought about the completion ⁶² of the building under the aegis of the God of Israel and by order of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, king of Persia. ¹⁵ The house was finished on the third day ⁶³ of the month of Adar ⁶⁴ in the six year of the reign of king Darius. ⁶⁵

¹⁶ The people of Israel, including priests, Levites and all others who were returned exiles ⁶⁶ celebrated the dedication ⁶⁷ of the house of God with joy. ¹⁷ At the dedication of this house of God they sacrificed one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs and twelve goats as a sin offering for all of Israel, ⁶⁸ according to the number of the tribe of Israel. ¹⁸ They appointed priests in divisions and Levites in their courses, for the service in [the house] ⁶⁹ of God which is in Jerusalem, as had been prescribed in the book of Moses. ⁷⁰

56 Literally: "pleasing, or sweet smelling sacrifices."

57 Cf. ANET 316.

58 Presumably this also includes the thought of 'whoever violates this edict.'

59 Literally: "Let a timber be pulled away from his house and when erected, let him be struck upon it." TEV elaborates: "I further command that if anyone disobeys this order, a wooden beam is to be torn out of his house, sharpened on one end, and then driven through his body." The practice was not unusual. BDB describes it as a form of crucifixion. Public privy: literally in the MT is "dung hill." ICC suggests "public privy" reading *nvli* as an Assyrian loan word for refuse heap, dung hill or public privy. NEB "he shall be fastened erect to it (the beam) and flogged, and in addition his house shall be forfeit." Many of the Aramaic words or word orders are uncertain.

60 Literally: "put forth a hand."

61 Literally: "were building and succeeding."

62 Literally: "built and finished."

63 I Esdras: "the twenty third day" which would be a Friday. It is generally assumed that the word "twenty" was lost in the MT manuscripts.

64 Corresponding to March 12, 515, assuming that the calculation of the year is correct.

65 Thus about 4 1/2 years after Haggai's first call to action.

66 Literally: "sons of the captivity."

67 The word in the original language is *hnukka* becoming the name of the festival Hanukkah.

68 These offerings were surely costly but the offerings at the dedication of the first temple by Solomon vastly outshone this. Solomon's offerings in I Kings 8:63 were: 22,000 oxen, 120,000 sheep.

69 So Syriac & some ancient Greek manuscripts.

70 Here the Aramaic section ends. Another Aramaic section appears in 7:12 - 26.

6. *The Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread 6:19-22 = 1 Esdras 7:10-13*

¹⁹ The returned exiles celebrated the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month,⁷¹ ²⁰ All the priests and Levites united in purifying themselves: all of them were clean. They slaughtered the Passover lambs for all the returned exiles as well as for their fellow priests and for themselves. ²¹ The people of Israel who had returned from exile ate the Passover along with every one who had joined them and who had not become ceremonially unclean through dealings with those who were unclean,⁷² and worshipped the Lord, the God of Israel.⁷³ ²² They joyfully kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days for the Lord had caused them to be joyful since even the hearts of the kings of Assyria⁷⁴ were moved to support them⁷⁵ in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

<CHAPTER 7>

III Introduction of Ezra 7:1-10 = 1 Esdras 8:1-8

1 Genealogy of Ezra 7:1-5

¹ These events⁷⁶ occurred during the reign of king Artaxerxes of Persia, while Ezra, the son of Seraiah,⁷⁷ son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, ² son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, ³ son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, ⁴ son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, ⁵ son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron was the chief priest.

2. Summary of Ezra's Career 7:6-10

⁶ This man Ezra went up from Babylon. He was a scribe,⁷⁸ an expert in the Mosaic Law, which had been given by the Lord, the God of Israel. The king granted him all he requested, for he was the recipient of the favor of God.⁷⁹ ⁷ (Some of the lay people, along with those who were priests, Levites, cantors, warders (*or, gatekeepers*) and temple servants left to travel to Jerusalem in the seventh year of king Artaxerxes,⁸⁰ ⁸ Ezra arrived in Jerusalem during the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.) ⁹ He had begun his trek during the first month⁸¹ to go up from Babylon. On the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem for the benevolence of God accompanied him. ¹⁰ Ezra had dedicated himself to study the law of the Lord, and to observe it,⁸² and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel.

71 I.e. Nisan. Cf. Exodus 12:2-3, 6. If the date was 545 BCE it was April 21st.

72 TEV: "all those who had given up the pagan ways of the other peoples who were living in the land."

73 Hebrew obscure.

74 Possibly an early copying error. At this point in history Assyria was merely a province in the Persian Empire.

75 Literally: "strengthen their hands."

76 Some scholars feel this section of Ezra is nearly 60 years after the previous section. Some scholars would omit verses 1 - 6 since these verses do not seem to fit here, giving an awkward read.

77 There are perhaps 5 generations between Ezra and Seraiah. The genealogy is based on I Chronicles 6. While the genealogy might be faulty this is very secondary to the Ezra narrative.

78 I.e. at that time possibly a court scribe.

79 Literally: "since the hand of the Lord his God was on him."

80 If this was Artaxerxes I who reigned 464 - 424 BCE, the year would be 459 BCE. Scholars generally feel this is somewhat conjectural, feeling that this was Artaxerxes II 404 - 359 BCE. If so the date would be 389 BCE. Some scholars feel that this verse is an intrusion since Ezra is not mentioned.

81 So: Vulgate. Cf. Syriac. Hebrew: "that he was the foundation of the going up." The translation is emended, reading *yasad* or *yissad* for *yesud*. This verse is a repetition of the chronological date.

82 Ezra is presented as an ideal reformer who first lives and then teaches, making sure that things are done in a correct order. There is no insincerity, uncertainty or shallowness in Ezra.

*B Ezra's Commission*⁸³ 7:11 - 26 = I Esdras 8:8 - 29

1 Introduction 7:11 - 12

¹¹ This is the copy ⁸⁴ of the letter which king Artaxerxes gave to the priest ⁸⁵/scribe Ezra a scholar in the matters of the commandments ⁸⁶ of Israel. ¹² ⁸⁷ Artaxerxes, king of kings to the priest Ezra, a scholar of the law ⁸⁸ of the ⁸⁹ God of Heaven. [Peace!]⁹⁰

2. *Permission to Return* 7:13 - 14

¹³ Now I issue a decree that any Israelites residing in my kingdom, including priests and Levites who desire (*or, feel compelled*) to join you in going to Jerusalem, they have my permission. ¹⁴ You are sent, at the command of (*or, commissioned by*) the king and the seven advisors to investigate (*or, make inquiries about*) Judah and Jerusalem according to the law your God has entrusted to you.

9192

83 Some scholars reject parts of 7:11 - 8:36 as not being authentic. There is no manuscript evidence nor agreement among scholars as to what is not authentic.

84 This implies a source behind this Aramaic text being Old Persian *Parsegen*. The word for letter (*or, receipt*) is an Old Persian word meaning "memorandum."

85 Here the Hebrew word *kohen* is used instead of the Aramaic word *kumra*. Possibly the Hebrew word had become part of the lingua franca.

86 Literally: "the scribe of the words of the commandments."

87 Verses 12 - 26 are written in Aramaic.

88 Here a Persian word is used *dar* rather than *torah*. The Persians seem not to have differentiated between secular and sacred law.

89 The Aramaic text adds *gemir* meaning "perfect."

90 Added by Syriac, Vulgate & I Esdras 8:9. Possibly the word "perfect" cf. footnote 29 has that meaning. At this point in language studies this is unclear.