

Ezra 4

Verses 1- 5

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

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, 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."

The people asking the Jews to let them help in the building of the temple were the Samaritans. After the Assyrian conquest in 722 BC, a large portion of the Jewish population was deported to other countries and gentiles from these various countries were brought to Northern Israel. In time the Jewish population married these non-Israelites that were brought in by the king of Assyria. Also many of the gentiles that came to Palestine desired to follow the "god" of the land.

The Samaritans considered themselves descendants of the Israelites but they accepted only the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) because they believed it was the only divinely inspired word of God, with Moses being the last prophet. Despite their distinct practices, they maintained a sense of connection to the Jewish people, viewing them as brothers. However, the Samaritans worshipped on Mount Gerizim, believing it to be the most sacred mountain in the world. This was the location of their temple and where they meet for their festivals including the Passover. This is why there had been a long history of conflict between the two groups.

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."

From the Jewish perspective there could be no meeting of the minds since the Samaritans did not accept the rest of scripture as authoritative and they worshipped at a place that was not where the Lord God had put His name.

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

In the last chapter the Jewish men had just finished the foundation of the temple but when the work on the temple began the people of the land (the Samaritans) were able to discourage and frighten them from working on the temple.

Work on the 2nd temple ended in 536 and did not resume until 520 BC. a 15 year delay.

See chart 405

Kings of Persia 559 to 330 BC			
King	Reign (BC)	Events	Year
Cyrus	559-529	Cyrus releases the Jews	539
		Foundation of temple completed	538 - 536
		Work on temple stopped	536 - 520
Cambyses	529-522		
Smerdis (Bardiya)	522		
Darius I (Hystaspes)	521-486	Work on temple begins	520
		Temple completed	516
Xerxes I (Ahasuerus)	485-465		
Artaxerxes (Longimanus)	465-424		
		Nehemiah rebuilds the wall	445
Xerxes II	424		

The next 18 verses are about future resistance from the Samaritans. Then in verse 24 the story will resume from where we left off in verse 5.

Verses 6 - 16

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

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.

⁸ Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes, as follows— 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, 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 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 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. 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. 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, 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. 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.”

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

In verses 4 & 5 it was 536 BC and in this verse the writer of Ezra is referring to a letter written by the Samaritans to King Ahasuerus in 485 BC, 50 years in the future.

See chart 410

See chart 410

Kings of Persia 559 to 330 BC			
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Cyrus	559 - 529	Cyrus releases the Jews	539
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		Work on temple stopped	536 - 520
Cambyses	529-522		
Smerdis (Bardiya)	522		
Darius I (Hystaspes)	521-486	Work on temple begins	520
		Temple completed	516
Xerxes I (Ahashuerus)	485-465		
		Samaritians send letter to the king	485
Artaxerxes (Longimanus)	465-424		
	Ezra 4:7	Samaritians send letter to the king	465 - 460
	Ezra 4:12	Jews working on the wall	465 - 460
	Ezra 4:23	Work on the wall stopped shortly after it began	
		Nehemiah rebuilds the wall	445
Xerxes II	424		

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.

We don't know if they didn't get a response from King Ahasuerus or if they got a negative response, but they waited until a new king took the throne to write another letter. This was at least 20 years after the previous letter (465 BC or later).

See chart 410 above

⁸ Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes, as follows— 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, 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.

One of the revelations of this chapter is the racial makeup of the Samaritans.

1. The men of Erech
2. The Babylonians
3. The men of Susa, that is, the Elamites
4. The rest of the nations

See map 415



The Samaritans were made up of a small remnant of the ten northern tribes of Israel and various nations from Phoenicia (Lebanon) to Susa.

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.

The Samaritans wanted to stop Israel from building the wall around Jerusalem but they needed permission to stop the building. As was the case with the temple, the repairs to the wall around Jerusalem were started and then stopped because of opposition from the Samaritans.

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.

This was an accusation sent to the king before any crime had been committed.

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*.”

This was an exaggeration because Jerusalem was one small area beyond the Euphrates River. See Map 415 above.

Surely, the wives of these Samaritans had cried barrels of tears over their husband's exaggerations. ☺

Verses 17 - 23

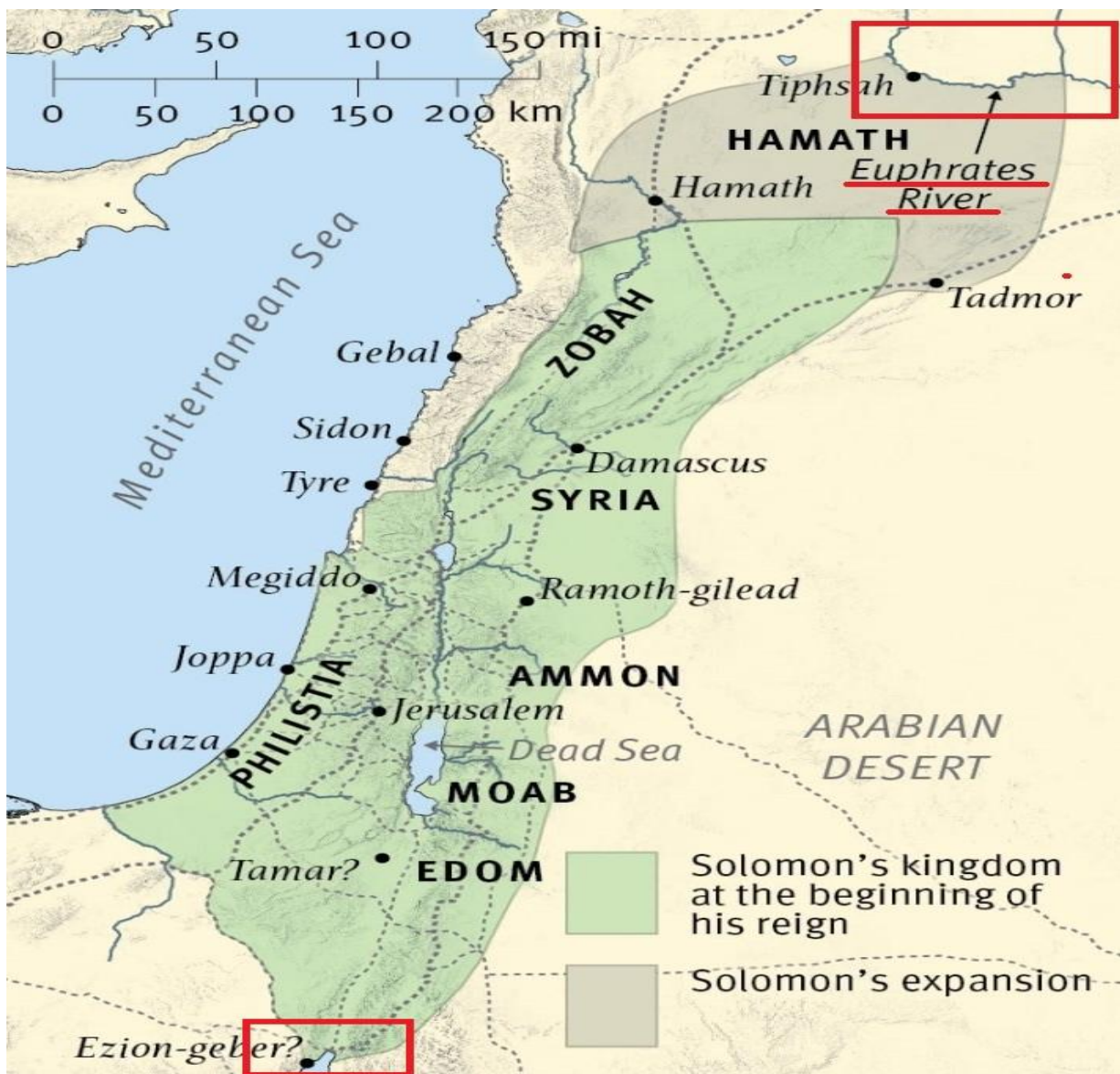
¹⁷ Then the king sent a response to Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their colleagues who live in Samaria and in the rest of *the provinces* beyond the *Euphrates River*: “Peace. And now, ¹⁸ the document which you sent to us has been translated *and* read before me. ¹⁹ And 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, 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. 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. ²² And beware of being negligent in carrying out this *matter*; why should there be great damage, to the detriment of the kings?”

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.

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, 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.

Since this was written from the perspective of an Assyrian king the land beyond the Euphrates meant the area below or south of the Euphrates River. So this is likely a reference to King Solomon who reigned over all the area from the Euphrates River to the Red Sea.

See map 420



However, the 50,000 Jews in and around Jerusalem at the present time (445 BC) could in no way do what Solomon did with a population of millions.

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

This letter shut down the building of the wall around Jerusalem for 5 years.

See chart 425 465 to 460 BC

Kings of Persia 559 to 330 BC			
King	Reign (BC)	Events	Year
Cyrus	559 - 529	Cyrus releases the Jews	539
		Foundation of temple completed	538 - 536
		Work on temple stopped	536 - 520
Cambyses	529-522		
Smerdis (Bardiya)	522		
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	Ezra 4:12	Jews working on the wall	465 - 460
	Ezra 4:23	Work on the wall stopped shortly after it began	
		Nehemiah rebuilds the wall	445
Xerxes II	424		
Sogdianus of Persia	424 – 423		
Darius II (Nothus)	423-405		
Artaxerxes (Mnemon)	404-359		
Artaxerxes III of Persia Ochus	358 – 338		
Arses of Persia (Artaxerxes IV)	338 – 336		
Darius III of Persia Codomannus	336 – 330		

.Verse 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.

The information about this long period of Samaritan opposition in verses 6 thru 23 comes to an end here and the author jumps back to the events of verse 5.

Work on the temple stopped until the 2nd year of Darius (520 BC).

See chart 430

King	Reign (BC)	Events	Year
Cyrus	559 - 529	Cyrus releases the Jews	539
		Foundation of temple completed	538 - 536
		Work on temple stopped	536
Cambyses	529-522		
Smerdis (Bardiya)	522		
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After a 15 year delay, work on the temple began again.

During the time of Daniel if a King of the Medes and Persians made a decree then according to the Medo-Persian law it was impossible to change it.

See Daniel 6:7 – 8

⁷ All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors, have consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who offers a prayer to any god or person besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be thrown into the lions' den. ⁸ Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it will not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked."

If the Jews in Jerusalem had known about this law then the work on the temple would not have been delayed for 15 years because the building of the temple had been decreed by King Cyrus.