

Ezra 4:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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. This verse shifts from security concerns to economic arguments. The opponents claimed Jerusalem's restoration would result in tax rebellion, threatening imperial revenue. The three terms—'toll' (mindah, מִנְדָּה), 'tribute' (belo, בְּלֹא), and 'custom' (halach, חָלָךְ)—comprehensively cover various tax types: land tax, poll tax, and commercial duties. The comprehensive list emphasizes total economic loss, not merely partial reduction.

The phrase 'thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings' uses plural 'kings' (malkin, מֶלֶכִים), possibly referring to the king and crown prince, or more likely suggesting this loss would affect not only Artaxerxes but future rulers. This rhetorical move portrayed the issue as having long-term dynastic implications, not merely contemporary concern. By framing it as affecting royal posterity, opponents appealed to Artaxerxes' legacy concerns.

Theologically, this demonstrates how Satan often attacks God's work through financial fears and economic arguments. When spiritual opposition fails, enemies frequently shift to pragmatic concerns about money, resources, and material consequences. These arguments often prove more effective than direct religious

opposition because they appear more reasonable and secular. Yet they equally oppose God's purposes.

Historical Context

Persian imperial finance depended heavily on provincial taxation. The empire's vast administrative and military apparatus required substantial revenue from subject peoples. Tax collection systems were sophisticated, with various imposts on land, persons, and commercial transactions. Any threat to revenue streams would indeed concern imperial authorities.

However, Judah was a small, poor province contributing minimally to imperial coffers. The economic impact of Jerusalem's restoration would have been negligible in the empire's overall budget. The opponents greatly exaggerated the financial threat, knowing the king would likely not investigate claims about a minor province carefully. This manipulation exploited bureaucratic distance—the king knew nothing about Judah's actual economic significance.

The mention of lost revenue had historical precedent. Previous rebellious regions had indeed withheld taxes, and empires routinely punished such defiance brutally. By connecting Jerusalem's building activity to tax rebellion, opponents linked innocent construction with treasonous resistance, making their accusations appear more credible.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How do economic arguments against God's work often mask spiritual opposition while appearing more reasonable?

- What does this passage teach about the need to evaluate whether financial concerns are legitimate or merely pretexts?
- How should believers respond when opponents frame spiritual opposition in purely economic or practical terms?

Interlinear Text

זֶה קְרִיט אֲתָה בְּנֵי מֶלֶךְ יְמִינֵךְ אֵיךְ יְעַמֵּךְ כַּעַל |
 now Be it known H1934 of the kings H1768 that if H2006 city H7149 this H1791

תְּפִלָּג בְּלֹא מִנְדָּה יְשַׁתְּכָלֵל אֵין יְשׁוּבֵי הַתְּהִבָּג אֵין
 be builded and the walls set up toll tribute and custom
 H1124 H7792 H3635 H4061 H1093 H1983

מֶלֶךְ יְמִינֵךְ אֵיךְ יְעַמֵּךְ כַּעַל אֵיךְ יְנַתֵּן וְאֵין
 again then will they not pay the revenue of the kings
 H3809 H5415 H674 H4430

תְּפִלָּג:
 and so thou shalt endamage
 H5142

Additional Cross-References

Ezra 7:24 (Parallel theme): Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them.

Nehemiah 5:4 (Kingdom): There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards.