

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, בֶּלֹ), and 'custom' (halach, חֶלֶךְ)—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, מַלְכִין), 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?

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

Interlinear Text

כֵּעַ	יָד יַעַ	לְהוֹ א	מֶלֶךְ יִם	דָּ י	הָ	קִרְיָתָ א	זֶה
now	Be it known	H1934	of the kings	H1768	that if	city	this
H3705	H3046		H4430		H2006	H7149	H1791
וְהִלְךְ	בְּל ו	מִנְדָּה	וְשִׁתְּכָלֵל וְ	וְשׁוּבֵי ה	וְתִבְנֶה א		
and custom	tribute	toll	set up	and the walls	be builded		
H1983	H1093	H4061	H3635	H7792	H1124		
וְהִלְךְ	מֶלֶךְ יִם	וְאֶפְתָּם	וְנָתַן וְ	לָ א			
and custom	of the kings	the revenue	pay	again then will they not			
H1983	H4430	H674	H5415	H3809			
					וְהִנָּק:		
					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.