

# Ezra 4:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

## Analysis

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**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.** Artaxerxes' response demonstrates royal protocol. The formal address to Rehum, Shimshai, and their coalition mirrors the letter's opening, acknowledging all signatories. The greeting 'Peace' (shlam, שְׁלָמָה) was standard but also ironic—this letter would disrupt peace by authorizing forceful action against Jewish rebuilding. 'At such a time' completes the epistolary formula.

The king's reply to provincial officials shows Persian administrative efficiency. The response came quickly, suggesting the accusations received serious attention. Ancient communication systems, while slower than modern technology, enabled relatively rapid correspondence between provincial governors and the imperial court. This infrastructure served both divine purposes (enabling Cyrus's decree, Darius's confirmation) and opposition (allowing enemies to manipulate imperial policy).

Theologically, this verse reminds us that earthly authority structures operate according to their own logic and procedures, sometimes advancing God's purposes and sometimes hindering them. Believers navigate complex reality where the same governmental systems can protect religious freedom (as under Cyrus) or restrict it

(as here under Artaxerxes). God remains sovereign over all, using even opposition to accomplish ultimate purposes.

## Historical Context

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Persian royal correspondence followed elaborate conventions. The king's scribes drafted responses that balanced imperial dignity with appropriate acknowledgment of provincial officials. Reply speed varied depending on message urgency and imperial schedule. This response came relatively quickly, suggesting Artaxerxes viewed the accusations as serious.

The mention of Samaria highlights that region's role as opposition center. Samaria had been Israel's northern capital but now housed a mixed, largely non-Jewish population hostile to Judean restoration. The Samaritan schism that fully developed by New Testament times had roots in this post-exilic period when Samaritans and Jews became increasingly antagonistic over temple location, legitimate priesthood, and covenant identity.

Archaeological evidence shows Persian administrative centers in Samaria during this period. The region's economic and political importance exceeded Judah's, giving Samaritan officials leverage with Persian authorities. This power imbalance partly explains how opposition successfully manipulated imperial policy against the weaker Judean community.

## Related Passages

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**James 2:17** — Faith and works

**Romans 1:17** — The righteous shall live by faith

## Study Questions

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1. How do believers navigate situations where governmental authorities alternate between supporting and opposing God's work?

2. What does Persian administrative efficiency teach about the neutral character of systems that can serve either good or evil purposes?
3. How should Christians maintain proper respect for authorities even when those authorities make unjust decisions?

## Interlinear Text

פָּתַגְמָת אָ	שֶׁל חָ	מֶלֶךְ אָ	עַל	רְחֵם וּמְ	בָּעֵל	טָעֵם
<b>an answer</b>	<b>Then sent</b>	<b>the king</b>	<b>unto</b>	<b>Rehum</b>	<b>the chancellor</b>	H2942
H6600	H7972	H4430	H5922	H7348	H1169	
וְשָׁמֵשׁ	אָ	סְפִּירָה	וְשָׁאָר	בְּנֵי תְּהֵן	דָּי	יְתַבְּ יְ
<b>and to Shimshai</b>	<b>the scribe</b>	<b>and to the rest</b>	<b>of their companions</b>		H1768	<b>that dwell</b>
H8124	H5613	H7606	H3675			H3488
בְּשָׁמַרְתָּ	רְשָׁאָר	עַבְרָה	הַנְּכָבָה	שְׁלָמָה	וְכָעֵת:	
<b>in Samaria</b>	<b>and to the rest</b>	<b>beyond</b>	<b>the river</b>	<b>Peace</b>	<b>and at such a time</b>	
H8115	H7606	H5675	H5103	H8001	H3706	

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