

# 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

**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, שְׁלָמִים) 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

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טַעַם	בַּעַל	רְחֻם	עַל	מֶלֶךְ	א	שָׁלַח	פְּתָגָם	א
H2942	H1169	H7348	H5922	H4430		H7972	H6600	
	the chancellor	Rehum	unto	the king		Then sent	an answer	
יָתֵב יִן	דִּי	כְּנָן תְּהוֹן	וְשָׂא ר	סִפְרָא	א	וְשִׁמְשַׁי		
H3488	H1768	H3675	H7606	H5613		H8124		
that dwell	of their companions	and to the rest	the scribe	and to Shimshai				
וּכְעַתָּה	שָׁלָם	בְּהֶכָה	עֲבָר	וְשָׂא ר	בְּשָׁמְרָא	יִן		
H3706	H8001	H5103	H5675	H7606		H8115		
and at such a time	Peace	the river	beyond	and to the rest	in Samaria			

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