

Ezra 4:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me.

Analysis

The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me. The phrase 'plainly read' (mepharash qeri) means 'distinctly read' or 'explained,' indicating the Aramaic letter was translated and interpreted for the king. This suggests Artaxerxes either didn't read Aramaic fluently despite its status as imperial administrative language, or more likely, that royal protocol required official presentation and translation of provincial correspondence. The phrase 'before me' emphasizes personal royal attention—this wasn't delegated to subordinates but reached the king himself.

The acknowledgment that the letter 'hath been... read' confirms receipt and consideration, standard protocol in ancient correspondence. However, the passive construction and emphasis on process rather than immediate response hint at bureaucratic deliberation. The king didn't react impulsively but followed established procedures for evaluating provincial intelligence. This carefulness partially protected the Jewish community—a more impetuous ruler might have reacted more harshly.

Theologically, God's providence operates through even mundane administrative procedures. The requirement for formal reading and translation introduced delay and process that providentially mitigated potential harm. God's sovereignty doesn't require miraculous intervention when ordinary human procedures serve His purposes. The same administrative systems opponents exploited also constrained their success.

Historical Context

Persian kings received constant streams of correspondence from throughout their vast empire. Royal scribes managed this information flow, presenting summaries and full texts as appropriate. The king's acknowledgment that the letter was 'plainly read before me' suggests this communication received high-level attention, not merely routine processing by subordinates.

Ancient Near Eastern royal courts employed multiple languages and required translation services. While Aramaic was the administrative lingua franca, Persian rulers primarily spoke Old Persian. Court proceedings often involved multiple languages, creating complex communication dynamics. This multilingual reality both facilitated empire-wide administration and created opportunities for misunderstanding or manipulation through translation.

The formal acknowledgment of received correspondence was standard practice, ensuring provincial officials knew their messages reached the king and would receive response. This protocol maintained administrative coherence across vast distances and prevented provincial officials from claiming ignorance of royal policy. The system worked efficiently but created vulnerabilities when officials sent false or misleading information.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does God work through ordinary bureaucratic procedures to accomplish His sovereign purposes?

2. What does the formal reading process teach about the importance of careful deliberation before making significant decisions?
3. How should believers pray when God's work faces institutional opposition—for miraculous intervention or providential guidance through existing systems?

Interlinear Text

נִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה	דִּי	שְׁלַחַת וִן	עַל יָנָא	מִפְּרִי שׁ	קִרְי	קִדְמִי:
The letter	H1768	which ye sent	unto us	hath been plainly	read	before
H5407		H7972	H5922	H6568	H7123	H6925

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