

Ezra 4:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein.

Analysis

And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein. Artaxerxes responded to the opponents' suggestion (v.15) by ordering archival research. The phrase 'I commanded, and search hath been made' shows royal initiative in verification rather than blindly accepting accusations. This demonstrates both Persian administrative sophistication and the king's cautiousness. The passive 'hath been made' suggests scribes conducted the actual research, but the king took responsibility for ordering it.

The findings confirmed opponents' basic claim: 'this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings.' Jerusalem had indeed rebelled against Babylon, and Persian archives inherited from conquered Babylon documented these rebellions. The three terms—'insurrection' (mithnase, מִתְנָשֵׁה), 'rebellion' (mered, מֵרֵד), and 'sedition' (ishtaddur, אִשְׁתָּדָר)—emphasize the city's historical defiance. This repetition intensified the characterization beyond neutral historical observation to hostile judgment.

Theologically, this verse illustrates how selective historical truth can support false conclusions. Jerusalem did rebel against Babylon, but that history didn't mean current returnees plotting rebellion against Persia. Past disobedience under different circumstances shouldn't determine present assessment. Yet opponents

successfully used selective history to prejudice the king against innocent people. This pattern continues—past failures are often weaponized against those genuinely pursuing obedience.

Historical Context

Persian archives would have contained detailed Babylonian records about Jerusalem and Judah. The Babylonian Chronicles, partially preserved archaeologically, documented military campaigns including those against Jerusalem. These records would have described Jehoiakim's rebellion (2 Kings 24:1), Zedekiah's revolt (2 Kings 24:20-25:21), and the resulting destructions. This historical data was accurate.

However, the research failed to note crucial context: God had ordained those rebellions' punishment through Babylon (Jeremiah 25:8-11), Persia had replaced Babylon as the dominant power under different policies, and Cyrus himself had authorized the return (Ezra 1:1-4). Raw historical data without proper context creates misleading conclusions. The archives provided facts but not theological or political wisdom to interpret them correctly.

Ancient record-keeping practices emphasized events affecting imperial interests—rebellions, tax payments, military campaigns. Archival research could easily confirm Jerusalem's rebellious past because those events merited documentation. More mundane periods of loyalty received less attention. This created documentation bias where problematic behavior was overrepresented in records compared to faithful compliance.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does selective use of historical truth lead to false conclusions about present realities?
2. What does Artaxerxes' archival research teach about the importance and limitations of historical investigation?
3. How should Christians respond when opponents cite their past failures to discredit current faithful service?

Interlinear Text

מִן	שִׁים	בָּעֵם	רֹא	וְבָקַר	חִזְקָה	וְבָשָׂכָה	תְּ
And I	commanded		H2942	and search		hath been made and it is found	H1768
H4481	H7761			H1240		H7912	
city	that this	And I	time	old	against	kings	
H7149	H1791	H4481	H3118	H5957	H5922	H4430	
מִתְּנַשֵּׁא	ה	זֶה	מִן	יָמָת	עַל	מֶלֶךְ	יְ
hath made insurrection		and that rebellion	and	rebellion	and	have been made	H0
H5376		H4776		H849		H5648	

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 25:2 (Kingdom): It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.

2 Kings 18:7 (Kingdom): And the LORD was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not.