

Ezra 4:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me.

Analysis

Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me.

Artaxerxes orders immediate cessation of Jerusalem's reconstruction. The imperative 'Give ye now commandment' delegates authority to Rehum and company to enforce the decree locally. The phrase 'cause these men to cease' (battelu gulbraya) means 'make the men stop,' authorizing forceful intervention if necessary. This transformed opponents from accusers into authorized enforcers with royal backing.

The qualification 'until another commandment shall be given from me' technically leaves the door open for future reversal, showing royal wisdom. Artaxerxes stopped the work without permanently prohibiting it or revoking Cyrus's original decree. This moderation suggests the king maintained some skepticism about opponents' accusations while still responding to their concerns. The conditional nature protected imperial prerogative for future policy changes.

Theologically, this temporary setback demonstrates that God's purposes aren't thwarted by human opposition. The work stopped for a time, but God would later move Artaxerxes himself to authorize both Ezra's mission (458 BC) and Nehemiah's wall-building (445 BC). What seemed like defeat proved temporary, teaching that apparent failures in God's work may be providential redirections rather than ultimate defeats.

Historical Context

This decree, issued around 464-458 BC, halted temple work that had already been completed (515 BC) but apparently targeted wall construction or repairs. The chronology of Ezra 4 is complex, summarizing various opposition instances across different reigns. This particular episode likely occurred between the temple completion under Darius and Ezra's arrival under Artaxerxes.

The phrase 'until another commandment' proved prophetic. The same Artaxerxes who issued this prohibition later authorized Ezra's religious reforms (Ezra 7) and Nehemiah's wall reconstruction (Nehemiah 2). This dramatic reversal demonstrates both royal prerogative to change policy and God's sovereignty over royal hearts. What one commandment prohibited, another permitted—divine providence worked through the same imperial authority.

The cessation order's temporary nature reflects Persian administrative pragmatism. Rather than making irreversible decisions based on one-sided information, Artaxerxes preserved flexibility. This administrative wisdom, whether intentional or providential, prevented permanent damage to God's purposes while addressing immediate provincial concerns.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How do temporary setbacks in God's work test faith and reveal whether we trust divine sovereignty or merely favorable circumstances?
2. What does the conditional nature of this decree teach about maintaining hope even when facing authoritative opposition?
3. How should believers respond to 'closed doors' in ministry—as final answers or temporary delays requiring patient faithfulness?

Interlinear Text

כָּעַן	יִתְּשֶׁם:	טֵעַ ם	לְבַטֵּל א	גְּבֻרֵי א	אֵלֶּה הַ	עִיר
ye now	Give	commandment	to cause	men	these	city
H3705	H7761	H2942	H989	H1400	H479	H7149
וְזֶה	לֹא	תִּבְנֶה א	עַד	מִנִּי י	טֵעַמָּה א	יִתְּשֶׁם:
and that this	be not	buildd	until	from me	another commandment	Give
H1791	H3809	H1124	H5705	H4481	H2941	H7761

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