

Ezra 4:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?

Analysis

Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings? Artaxerxes warns Rehum and colleagues against negligence in implementing his decree. The phrase 'Take heed' (zehirin havu) means 'be careful' or 'be warned,' emphasizing the order's seriousness. 'Fail not to do this' threatens consequences for non-compliance, ensuring vigorous enforcement. The rhetorical question 'why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?' implies that allowing Jerusalem's reconstruction would personally harm the royal dynasty, accepting opponents' framing completely.

The plural 'kings' (as in v.13) suggests concern for dynastic succession and long-term imperial interests. Artaxerxes presented stopping Jerusalem as protecting not only his own reign but future rulers' inheritance. This rhetorical move elevated a local matter to transgenerational imperial crisis, justifying decisive action. The king thus bought fully into opponents' catastrophic narrative.

Theologically, this demonstrates how partial information and one-sided presentations can lead even well-intentioned authorities to make unjust decisions. Artaxerxes wasn't malicious but misinformed. His decree, while harmful to God's people, flowed from incomplete understanding rather than deliberate evil. This teaches that injustice often results from information asymmetry and biased counsel, not merely wicked intent.

Historical Context

Persian administration expected vigorous enforcement of royal decrees. Officials who failed to implement imperial commands faced severe consequences, explaining Artaxerxes' warning. This pressure ensured that once the decree was issued, Rehum and colleagues would enforce it zealously—they couldn't afford accusations of negligence.

The concern about 'damage... to the hurt of the kings' reflects imperial paranoia about provincial rebellion. Persian history included rebellions that weakened or briefly fragmented the empire. Artaxerxes himself faced revolts in Egypt and elsewhere during his reign. This context made him susceptible to warnings about potential rebellion, even when evidence was thin or fabricated.

The king's complete acceptance of opponents' framing shows successful propaganda. Rehum's coalition had skillfully connected Jerusalem's modest reconstruction to existential imperial threats, exploiting royal anxieties. Their strategy succeeded not through overwhelming evidence but through psychological manipulation of imperial fears and prejudices.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does information control and one-sided counsel lead even well-intentioned leaders to make unjust decisions?
2. What responsibility do believers have to ensure decision-makers receive complete, accurate information?
3. How should Christians respond when authorities make harmful decisions based on incomplete or false information?

Interlinear Text

לְמַה דָּנֵה עַל לְמַעַב דְּשָׁלֵן וְזַהֲרֵי יְהוָה

H2095

Take heed

now that ye fail

לְמַעַב דְּשָׁלֵן

H5648

עַל לְמַעַב דְּשָׁלֵן

not to do

דָּנֵה

this

לְמַה

why

H4101

מֶלֶךְ אֶת־חַבֵּל אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁגַּע אֶל־לְפִנֵּיכֶךָ תְּמִלְיכָה:

grow

should damage

לְפִנֵּיכֶךָ תְּמִלְיכָה:

H5142

H4430

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