

Ezra 4:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue.

Analysis

And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue. This verse advances the timeline to Artaxerxes I (465-424 BC), showing sustained, multi-generational opposition. The enemies' persistence demonstrates that spiritual warfare doesn't relent when initial efforts fail. The named opponents—Bishlam ('man of peace,' ironically), Mithredath ('given by Mithra'), and Tabeel ('God is good')—represent a coalition of Persian officials and local leaders united against God's purposes.

The detail about Syrian (Aramaic) language and interpretation emphasizes official, governmental formality. Aramaic was the administrative language of the Persian Empire, ensuring this letter received serious official attention. The repetition 'written... written... interpreted' stresses the bureaucratic precision calculated to maximize damage. This wasn't casual complaint but sophisticated political maneuvering exploiting imperial administrative systems.

The passage demonstrates how evil works systematically through legitimate structures. The letter's official character made it more dangerous than physical attacks—it threatened to invoke imperial power against the returned exiles. This

foreshadows Jesus's trial where opponents manipulated Roman legal systems to accomplish what they couldn't through religious authority alone.

Historical Context

Artaxerxes I 'Longimanus' (long-handed) ruled the Persian Empire during its mature period. His reign saw both Ezra's return (458 BC) and later Nehemiah's mission (445 BC). The empire's administrative sophistication allowed effective governance across vast territories through standardized Aramaic correspondence and local officials.

The Syrian (Aramaic) tongue had become the lingua franca of the Near East, displacing Akkadian. Its use in official correspondence reflects the linguistic unity that facilitated Persian administration. Jewish leaders needed to master Aramaic for political engagement, explaining its prominence in later biblical books (Daniel, Ezra). This bilingual reality shaped post-exilic Judaism's cultural adaptation while maintaining Hebrew for religious purposes.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How do systems and institutions, originally designed for good, become instruments of opposition to God's work?
2. What wisdom is needed to navigate situations where legal or bureaucratic powers are manipulated against righteousness?
3. How should Christians maintain integrity when facing sophisticated political or institutional opposition?

Interlinear Text

טְבֵאל	מִתְרַדָּת	בִּשְׁלָם	כֶּת וּב	אַרְתַּחְשַׁשׁ שְׁתָּא	וּבֵי י
Tabeel	Mithredath	Bishlam	was written	of Artaxerxes	And in the days
H2870	H4990	H1312	H3789	H783	H3117
פֶּךְ ס	מֶלֶךְ	אַרְתַּחְשַׁשׁ שְׁתָּא	עַל	כְּנוֹתָ ו	וּשְׁאָר
of Persia	king	of Artaxerxes		of their companions	and the rest
H6539	H4428	H783	H5921	H3674	H7605
וּמְתַרְגָּם	אַרְמִית:	כֶּת וּב	הַנִּשְׁתָּן	וּכְתָב	
and interpreted	in the Syrian tongue	was written	of the letter	and the writing	
H8638	H762	H3789	H5406	H3791	
אַרְמִית:					
					in the Syrian tongue
					H762

Additional Cross-References

2 Kings 18:26 (Parallel theme): Then said Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and Shebna, and Joah, unto Rabshakeh, Speak, I pray thee, to thy servants in the Syrian language; for we understand it: and talk not with us in the Jews' language in the ears of the people that are on the wall.

Daniel 2:4 (Kingdom): Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation.

Isaiah 36:11 (Parallel theme): Then said Eliakim and Shebna and Joah unto Rabshakeh, Speak, I pray thee, unto thy servants in the Syrian language; for we understand it: and speak not to us in the Jews' language, in the ears of the people that are on the wall.

Ezra 4:17 (Kingdom): 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.

Ezra 4:9 (Parallel theme): Then wrote Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, and the Elamites,

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