

# Ezra 4:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort:

## Analysis

**Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort:** This verse introduces the letter's authors—Rehum the 'chancellor' (be'el te'em, בְּעֵל טַעַם, literally 'master of decree' or 'commander') and Shimshai the 'scribe' (safar, סָפָר). These were provincial officials with authority to communicate directly with the king. Their positions gave their accusations credibility and ensured serious consideration.

The phrase 'wrote a letter against Jerusalem' reveals hostile intent. The preposition 'against' (al, לַ) indicates opposition and hostility, not neutral reporting. This was prosecutorial correspondence designed to damage, not honest administrative communication. The specificity 'against Jerusalem' rather than 'about Jerusalem' exposes their agenda—they weren't seeking information but destruction of the city and its rebuilding efforts.

Theologically, this demonstrates how positions of authority can be abused to oppose God's purposes. Rehum and Shimshai possessed legitimate administrative roles but weaponized them against covenant purposes. This pattern repeats—Pharisees and Sadducees held religious authority yet opposed Jesus; Roman governors held legal authority yet crucified the Lord of Glory. Authority apart from submission to God's ultimate authority becomes tyranny.

## Historical Context

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Persian provincial administration relied on local officials like Rehum who understood regional dynamics while representing imperial interests. The 'chancellor' or military commander held significant power, responsible for maintaining order and reporting threats to imperial stability. Scribes like Shimshai possessed bureaucratic expertise, drafting official correspondence and maintaining records.

The letter-writing system connected far-flung provinces to the imperial center. Literacy was restricted, making scribes powerful gatekeepers who shaped how information reached the king. This created opportunity for manipulation—selective reporting or framing could dramatically influence royal perception and policy. The returnees faced not just local opposition but systematic exploitation of imperial administrative systems against them.

## Related Passages

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**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

**1 Corinthians 13:4** — Characteristics of love

## Study Questions

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1. How can Christians recognize when legitimate authority is being abused to oppose God's work?
2. What responsibility do believers have to respect civil authority while maintaining ultimate allegiance to God?
3. How should churches respond when governmental or institutional powers become hostile to Christian mission?

## Interlinear Text

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רְחֻם	בַּעַל	טַעַם	וְשִׁמְשַׁי	סֹפֵר	כָּתַב	אֵת
<b>Rehum</b>	<b>the chancellor</b>	H2942	<b>and Shimshai</b>	<b>the scribe</b>	<b>wrote</b>	<b>letter</b>
H7348	H1169		H8124	H5613	H3790	H104
הָא	עַל	יְרוּשָׁלַיִם	לְאַרְתַּחְשָׁשׁ	מֶלֶךְ	כֵּן	כֵּן
<b>a</b>	<b>against</b>	<b>Jerusalem</b>	<b>to Artaxerxes</b>	<b>the king</b>	<b>in this sort</b>	
H2298	H5922	H3390	H783	H4430	H3660	

## Additional Cross-References

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**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,