

# Ezra 5:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?

## Analysis

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Tatnai, as 'governor on this side the river' (pachath abar nahara), governed the Persian satrapy west of the Euphrates, making him Zerubbabel's superior in the imperial hierarchy. His arrival 'at the same time' as construction commenced suggests intelligence networks informed Persian authorities of the activity. Shethar-boznai likely served as Tatnai's secretary or assistant official.

The question 'Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?' focuses on authorization within Persian bureaucracy. Ancient Near Eastern empires required royal permission for significant building projects, especially fortifications. Tatnai's concern was procedural—ensuring proper authorization existed—rather than merely hostile opposition. This demonstrates how God's work must sometimes navigate governmental systems and regulations.

Theologically, this verse illustrates that obeying God doesn't exempt believers from accountability to earthly authorities. Zerubbabel and Jeshua couldn't claim divine calling as reason to ignore imperial law. Instead, they had to demonstrate that their work had proper authorization (Cyrus's original decree). This models Christian dual citizenship—ultimate allegiance to God while respecting legitimate governmental authority (Romans 13:1-7).

## Historical Context

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Persian administrative practice required detailed documentation and authorization for major projects. The extensive bureaucracy prevented local officials from initiating significant work without central approval. Tatnai's inquiry followed standard procedure rather than representing uniquely hostile opposition to Jews.

The mention of 'this wall' alongside 'this house' has generated scholarly discussion. Some suggest opponents falsely claimed Jews were rebuilding defensive fortifications (which would threaten imperial security), while others view 'wall' as referring to temple enclosure walls. The concern about walls recalls earlier opposition claims that Jerusalem's rebuilding aimed at rebellion (Ezra 4:12-16).

Archaeological evidence shows Persian satrapies maintained communication systems enabling rapid information flow. Royal roads and courier systems meant local activities quickly reached central authorities. This infrastructure, while potentially threatening to Jews, ultimately served God's purposes by allowing Darius to investigate, confirm Cyrus's decree, and order project continuation with imperial funding.

## Related Passages

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**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

## Study Questions

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1. How does Tatnai's procedural inquiry distinguish legitimate governmental oversight from hostile opposition to God's work?
2. What does this verse teach about navigating bureaucratic systems while pursuing God's calling?

3. How should believers balance ultimate allegiance to God with respect for legitimate governmental authority?

## Interlinear Text

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בַּהּ	זָמָנָא	אָתָּה	עָלֵיהֶם	תַּתְּנִי	פַּחַת	עֲבָר
H0	At the same time	came	unto them	to them Tatnai	governor	on this side
	H2166	H858	H5922	H8674	H6347	H5675
הַ	וְשֶׁתַּר	בּוֹזַנַי	וְכַנְזֵיהֶם	אָמַר	יֵן	
the river	H0	and Shetharboznai	and their companions	thus	and said	
H5103		H8370	H3675	H3652	H560	
מִן	לָהֶם	שָׁם	לָכֶם	טַעַם	בֵּיתָה	דָּנָה
H0	Who	hath commanded	H0	H2942	house	this
	H4479	H7761			H1005	H1836
						you to build
						H1124
א	וְאֶשְׁרֵנָּה	דָּנָה	לְשַׁכְּלָלָהּ:			
wall	this	and to make up				
H846	H1836	H3635				

## Additional Cross-References

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**Ezra 6:6** (Parallel theme): Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shethar-boznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence:

**Ezra 1:3** (Parallel theme): Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

**Ezra 6:13** (Parallel theme): Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shethar-boznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily.

**Ezra 5:9** (Parallel theme): Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls?

