

Ezra 7:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?

Analysis

Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? Artaxerxes' decree shows remarkable theological awareness, acknowledging 'the God of heaven' and His authority to command. The phrase 'let it be diligently done' (asqarna yitabed) means 'zealously performed' or 'carefully executed,' commanding vigorous compliance with divine requirements. This wasn't token gesture but royal mandate for serious religious observance.

The motivation—'for why should there be wrath against the realm'—reveals the king's concern about divine judgment. Whether this reflects genuine piety or pragmatic fear, Artaxerxes recognized that offending Israel's God could have political consequences. Ancient polytheists typically placated all deities, viewing religious offense as risking divine retribution. The king's concern for his sons' welfare shows this wasn't merely abstract theology but personal fear about dynastic survival.

Theologically, this demonstrates God's ability to work through even pagan rulers' incomplete or self-interested theology. Artaxerxes may not have worshiped Yahweh exclusively, but his acknowledgment of divine authority served God's purposes. God doesn't require perfect understanding from rulers He uses; He sovereignly

accomplishes His will through their decisions regardless of their motivation or theological comprehension.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern rulers typically acknowledged and supported various deities, practicing religious inclusivism rather than exclusive monotheism. Artaxerxes' support for Jewish worship aligned with Persian policy of religious tolerance documented in the Cyrus Cylinder and other sources. Supporting subject peoples' religions created stability and won loyalty without requiring the king's personal conversion.

The concern about divine wrath reflects widespread ancient belief that offending any deity risked calamity. Persian Zoroastrianism emphasized cosmic struggle between good and evil, making Persians sensitive to religious dynamics. Whether Artaxerxes viewed Yahweh as supremely powerful or merely one god among many, he deemed Him worthy of respect and appeasement.

The reference to 'his sons' connects personal concern to broader dynastic interests. Ancient rulers obsessed over succession and dynasty preservation. By framing temple support as ensuring his sons' welfare, Artaxerxes showed how even selfish dynastic concerns could serve God's redemptive purposes. Providence works through mixed motivations, accomplishing holy ends through less-than-pure human intentions.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What does Artaxerxes' concern about divine wrath teach about God's reputation among nations?

2. How does God's use of imperfect or self-interested rulers encourage believers when facing ungodly authorities?
3. What does zealous compliance with 'commanded by the God of heaven' teach about obedience to divine requirements?

Interlinear Text

כֵּל	לִי	מִן	עִם	טַעַם	אֶל	הָ	שְׁמִינִי	אֶל	יְהִי	עָשָׂה
Whatsoever	for	by	is commanded	of the God	of heaven				done	
H3606	H1768	H4481	H2941	H426	H8065				H5648	
let it be diligently	for the house	of the God	of heaven	for	why					
H149	H1005	H426	H8065	H1768	H4101					
should there be	wrath	against	the realm	of the king	and his sons					
H1934	H7109	H5922	H4437	H4430	H1123					

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 119:4 (Parallel theme): Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.

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