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EZRA 4: 1 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity were building a temple to the LORD, the God of Israel;

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The Samaritans endeavor to prevent the rebuilding of the temple, Ezr 4:1-5. They send letters to Artaxerxes, against the Jews, Ezr 4:6-9. A copy of the letter, Ezr 4:10-16. He commands the Jews to cease from building the temple, which they do; nor was any thing farther done in the work till the second year of Darius, Ezr 4:17-24.

Verse 1

Now when the adversaries - These were the Samaritans, and the different nations with which the kings of Assyria had peopled Israel, when they had carried the original inhabitants away into captivity, see Ezr 4:9, Ezr 4:10.

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EZRA 4: 2 then they drew near to Zerubbabel, and to the heads of fathers' households, and said to them, "Let us build with you; for we seek your God, as you do; and we sacrifice to him since the days of Esar Haddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here."

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Verse 2

Let us build with you - We acknowledge the same God, are solicitous for his glory, and will gladly assist you in this work. But that they came with no friendly intention, the context proves.

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EZRA 4: 3 But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers' households of Israel, said to them, "You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God; but we ourselves together will build to the LORD, the God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us."

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Verse 3

Ye have nothing to do with us - We cannot acknowledge you as worshippers of the true God, and cannot participate with you in anything that relates to his worship.

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EZRA 4: 4 Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building,

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Verse 4

Weakened the hands - Discouraged and opposed them by every possible means.

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EZRA 4: 5 and hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

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Verse 5

Hired counsellors - They found means to corrupt some of the principal officers of the Persian court, so that the orders of Cyrus were not executed; or at least so slowly as to make them nearly ineffectual.

Until the reign of Darius - This was probably Darius the son of Hystaspes.

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EZRA 4: 6 In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

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Verse 6

In the reign of Ahasuerus - This is the person who is called Cambyses by the Greeks. He reigned seven years and five months; and during the whole of that time the building of the temple was interrupted.

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EZRA 4: 7 In the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of his companions, to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in Syrian, and delivered in the Syrian language.

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Verse 7

In the days of Artaxerxes - After the death of Cambyses, one of the Magi named Oropaestus by Trogus Pompeius, Smerdis by Herodotus, Mardus by Aeschylus, and Sphendatates by Ctesias, usurped the empire, feigning himself to be Smerdis, the brother of Cambyses, who had been put to death. This is the person named Artaxerxes in the text: or, following the Hebrew, Artachshasta. It is generally believed, that from the time of Cyrus the great, Xerxes and Artaxerxes were names assumed by the Persian sovereigns, whatever their names had been before.

Written in the Syrian tongue - That is, the Syrian or Chaldean character was used; not the Hebrew.

Interpreted, in the Syrian tongue - That is, the language, as well as the character, was the Syriac or Chaldaic.

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EZRA 4: 8 Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort:

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Verse 8

Rehum the chancellor - With this verse the Chaldee part of the chapter begins; and the same language continues to the end of Ezr 6:18.

These men wrote to Darius in their own language; and the king in the same dialect returns an answer, chap. 5. This circumstance adds authenticity to what is written: so scrupulous was the inspired penman, that he not only gave the words which each spoke and wrote, but he gave them also in the very language in which they were conceived and in the character peculiar to that language.

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EZRA 4: 9 then Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions, the Dinaites, and the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Shushanchites, the Dehaites, the Elamites,

EZRA 4: 10 and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnappar brought over, and set in the city of Samaria, and in the rest of the country beyond the River, and so forth, wrote.

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#### Verse 10

The great and noble Asnapper - Whether this was Shalmaneser, or Esar-haddon, or some other person, learned men and chronologists are not agreed. The Syriac terms him Asphid; but of this person we know no more than we do of Asnapper. He might have been the military officer who was appointed to escort this people to Judea.

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EZRA 4: 11 This is the copy of the letter that they sent to Artaxerxes the king: Your servants the men beyond the River, and so forth.

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#### Verse 11

And at such a time - The word וּכְעֵנֶת ucheeneth has greatly perplexed all commentators and critics. The versions give us no light; and the Vulgate translates it et dicunt salutem, "and they wish prosperity." Some translate it and so forth; and our translators supposed that it referred to the date, which however is not specified, and might have been as easily entered as the words and at such a time.

In our first translation of the Bible, that by Coverdale, in 1535, the passage stands thus: "And other on this syde the water, and in Canaan."

In that by Becke, 1549, it is thus: "And other on this syde the water, and in Ceneeth:" and in the margin he enters "or peace," "or health." In Cardmarden's Bible, printed at Rouen, 1566, it stands thus: "And other that are nowe on thys syde the water." In that printed by Barker, 1615, we find the text thus: "And Other that are beyond the river, and Cheeneth;" on which is the following marginal note: "To wit, Euphrates: and he meaneth in respect of Babel, that they dwelt beyond it." And the note on Cheeneth is, "Which were a certain people that envied the Jews." All this is merely guessing, in the midst of obscurity; most of these having considered the original word כְּעֵנֶת Ceeneth as the name of a people; and in this they follow the Syriac, which uses the word Acaneth.

Calmet thinks we should read ובעת ubaeth, "and at this time;" as if they had said, "We wish thee to enjoy the same health and prosperity at all future times, which thou dost at present." This is not remote from the meaning of the Chaldee original.

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EZRA 4: 12 Be it known to the king, that the Jews who came up from you have come to us to Jerusalem; they are building the rebellious and the bad city, and have finished the walls, and repaired the foundations.

EZRA 4: 13 Be it known now to the king that if this city is built, and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and in the end it will be hurtful to the kings.

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#### Verse 13

Toll, tribute, and custom - The first term is supposed to imply the capitation tax; the second, an excise on commodities and merchandise; the third, a sort of land tax. Others suppose the first means a property tax; the second, a poll tax; and the third, what was paid on imports and exports. In a word, if you permit these people to rebuild and fortify their city, they will soon set you at naught, and pay you no kind of tribute.

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EZRA 4: 14 Now because we eat the salt of the palace, and it is not appropriate for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and informed the king;

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#### Verse 14

Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace - More literally: Now because at all times we are salted with the salt of the palace; i.e., We live on the king's bounty, and must be faithful to our benefactor. Salt was used as the emblem of an incorruptible covenant; and those who ate bread and salt together were considered as having entered into a very solemn covenant. These hypocrites intimated that they felt their conscience bound by the league between them and the king; and therefore could not conscientiously see any thing going on that was likely to turn to the king's damage. They were probably also persons in the pay of the Persian king.

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EZRA 4: 15 that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers: so you shall find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful to kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time; for which cause was this city laid waste.

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#### Verse 15

The book of the records of thy fathers - That is, the records of the Chaldeans, to whom the Persians succeeded.

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EZRA 4: 16 We inform the king that, if this city be built, and the walls finished, by this means you shall have no portion beyond the River.

EZRA 4: 17 Then the king sent an answer to Rehum the chancellor, and to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and in the rest of the country beyond the River: Peace, and so forth.

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#### Verse 17

Peace, and at such a time - The word וְכַעַתּוּ ucheeth is like that which we have already considered on Ezr 4:10, and probably has the same meaning.

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EZRA 4: 18 The letter which you sent to us has been plainly read before me.

EZRA 4: 19 I decreed, and search has been made, and it is found that this city of old time has made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein.

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#### Verse 19

Hath made insurrection against kings - How true is the proverb, "It is an easy thing to find a staff to beat a dog!" The struggles of the Israelites to preserve or regain their independency, which they had from God, are termed insurrection, rebellion, and sedition: because at last they fell under the power of their oppressors. Had they been successful in these struggles, such offensive words had never been used. In 1688 the people of England struggled to throw off an oppressive government, that was changing the times and the seasons, and overthrowing the religion of the country, and setting up in its place the spurious off-spring of popery and arbitrary government. They were successful; and it is called the Revolution: had they failed it would have been called rebellion; and the parties principally concerned would have been put to death.

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EZRA 4: 20 There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all the country beyond the River; and tribute, custom, and toll, was paid to them.

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#### Verse 20

Beyond the river - That is, the Euphrates. Both David and Solomon carried their conquests beyond this river. See 2Sam 8:3, etc., and 1Kgs 4:21, where it is said, Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river (Euphrates) unto the land of the Philistines; and unto the borders of Egypt.

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EZRA 4: 21 Make a decree now to cause these men to cease, and that this city not be built, until a decree shall be made by me.

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#### Verse 21

Until another commandment shall be given from me - The rebuilding was only provisionally suspended. The decree was, Let it cease for the present; nor let it proceed at any time without an order express from me.

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EZRA 4: 22 Take heed that you not be slack herein: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?

EZRA 4: 23 Then when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went in haste to Jerusalem to the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power.

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Verse 23

Made them to cease by force and power - Commanded them on pain of the king's displeasure not to proceed, obliging all to remit their labors, and probably bringing an armed force to prevent them from going forward.

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EZRA 4: 24 Then ceased the work of God's house which is at Jerusalem; and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

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Verse 24

So it ceased unto the second year of - Darius - They had begun in the first year of Cyrus, b.c. 536, to go up to Jerusalem, and they were obliged to desist from the building b.c. 522; and thus they continued till the second year of Darius, b.c. 519. See the chronology in Hag 1:1 (note) and Zac 1:1 (note) and the following chapter, Ezra 5 (note).