

1 Esdras 3, 4, 5:1-6 (RSV)

The history of Zerubbabel and how Darius of Persia made him governor of Judah.

3

1 Now King Darius gave a great banquet for all that were under him and all that were born in his house and all the nobles of Media and Persia

2 and all the satraps and generals and governors that were under him in the hundred and twenty-seven satrapies from India to Ethiopia.¹

3 They ate and drank, and when they were satisfied they departed; and Darius the king went to his bedroom, and went to sleep, and then awoke.

4 Then the three young men of the bodyguard, who kept guard over the person of the king, said to one another,

5 "Let each of us state what one thing is strongest; and to him whose statement seems wisest, Darius the king will give rich gifts and great honors of victory.

6 He shall be clothed in purple, and drink from gold cups, and sleep on a gold bed, and have a chariot with gold bridles, and a turban of fine linen, and a necklace about his neck;

7 and because of his wisdom he shall sit next to Darius and shall be called kinsman of Darius."²

8 Then each wrote his own statement, and they sealed them and put them under the pillow of Darius the king,

9 and said, "When the king wakes, they will give him the writing; and to the one whose statement the king and the three nobles of Persia judge to be wisest the victory shall be given according to what is written."

10 The first wrote, "Wine is strongest."

11 The second wrote, "The king is strongest."

12 The third wrote, "Women are strongest, but truth is victor over all things."

13 When the king awoke, they took the writing and gave it to him, and he read it.

14 Then he sent and summoned all the nobles of Persia and Media and the satraps and generals and governors and prefects,

15 and he took his seat in the council chamber, and the writing was read in their presence.

16 And he said, "Call the young men, and they shall explain their statements." So they were summoned, and came in.

17 And they said to them, "Explain to us what you have written." Then the first, who had spoken of the strength of wine, began and said:

18 "Gentlemen, how is wine the strongest? It leads astray the minds of all who drink it.

19 It makes equal the mind of the king and the orphan, of the slave and the free, of the poor and the rich.

20 It turns every thought to feasting and mirth, and forgets all sorrow and debt.

21 It makes all hearts feel rich, forgets kings and satraps, and makes every one talk in millions.

22 When men drink they forget to be friendly with friends and brothers, and before long they draw their swords.

23 And when they recover from the wine, they do not remember what they have done.

24 Gentlemen, is not wine the strongest, since it forces men to do these things?" When he had said this, he stopped speaking.

¹ The Persian (Achaemenid) Empire indeed spanned from the nearest edge of India to the nearest edge of Ethiopia. History states that Darius I set in order 23 satrap areas. The governors, also called satraps themselves, each had three assistants: a secretarial scribe, a chief financial officer, and a general. Adding up all these officials, the family members, and the nobles, the number of attendees easily sum to 127.

² It was not uncommon for a bodyguard to become the next king. After all, Darius was one of Cyrus the Great's bodyguards.

4

- 1 Then the second, who had spoken of the strength of the king, began to speak:
- 2 "Gentlemen, are not men strongest, who rule over land and sea and all that is in them?
- 3 But the king is stronger; he is their lord and master, and whatever he says to them they obey.
- 4 If he tells them to make war on one another, they do it; and if he sends them out against the enemy, they go, and conquer mountains, walls, and towers.
- 5 They kill and are killed, and do not disobey the king's command; if they win the victory, they bring everything to the king -- whatever spoil they take and everything else.
- 6 Likewise those who do not serve in the army or make war but till the soil, whenever they sow, reap the harvest and bring some to the king; and they compel one another to pay taxes to the king.
- 7 And yet he is only one man! If he tells them to kill, they kill; if he tells them to release, they release;
- 8 if he tells them to attack, they attack; if he tells them to lay waste, they lay waste; if he tells them to build, they build;
- 9 if he tells them to cut down, they cut down; if he tells them to plant, they plant.
- 10 All his people and his armies obey him. Moreover, he reclines, he eats and drinks and sleeps,
- 11 but they keep watch around him and no one may go away to attend to his own affairs, nor do they disobey him.
- 12 Gentlemen, why is not the king the strongest, since he is to be obeyed in this fashion?" And he stopped speaking.
- 13 Then the third, that is Zerubbabel, who had spoken of women and truth, began to speak:³
- 14 Gentlemen, is not the king great, and are not men many, and is not wine strong? Who then is their master, or who is their lord? Is it not women?
- 15 Women gave birth to the king and to every people that rules over sea and land.
- 16 From women they came; and women brought up the very men who plant the vineyards from which comes wine.
- 17 Women make men's clothes; they bring men glory; men cannot exist without women.⁴
- 18 If men gather gold and silver or any other beautiful thing, and then see a woman lovely in appearance and beauty,
- 19 they let all those things go, and gape at her, and with open mouths stare at her, and all prefer her to gold or silver or any other beautiful thing.
- 20 A man leaves his own father, who brought him up, and his own country, and cleaves to his wife.⁵
- 21 With his wife he ends his days, with no thought of his father or his mother or his country.
- 22 Hence you must realize that women rule over you! "Do you not labor and toil, and bring everything and give it to women?
- 23 A man takes his sword, and goes out to travel and rob and steal and to sail the sea and rivers;
- 24 he faces lions, and he walks in darkness, and when he steals and robs and plunders, he brings it back to the woman he loves.
- 25 A man loves his wife more than his father or his mother.
- 26 Many men have lost their minds because of women, and have become slaves because of them.
- 27 Many have perished, or stumbled, or sinned, because of women.⁶

³ History records that Darius appointed Zerubbabel as the governor of Judah, probably because of this account which occurred in 521 BC (see 5:6).

⁴ Paul probably speaks highly of women for the same reasons in 1Cor 11:11-12.

⁵ Zerubbabel is very familiar with Gen 2:24.

⁶ Indeed, Zerubbabel lists many sins in his speech: greed (18), lust (19), murder (23), and theft (23, 24).

28 And now do you not believe me? "Is not the king great in his power? Do not all lands fear to touch him?"

29 Yet I have seen him with Apame, the king's concubine, the daughter of the illustrious Bartacus; she would sit at the king's right hand ⁷

30 and take the crown from the king's head and put it on her own, and slap the king with her left hand.

31 At this the king would gaze at her with mouth agape. If she smiles at him, he laughs; if she loses her temper with him, he flatters her, that she may be reconciled to him.

32 Gentlemen, why are not women strong, since they do such things?"

33 Then the king and the nobles looked at one another; and he began to speak about truth:

34 "Gentlemen, are not women strong? The earth is vast, and heaven is high, and the sun is swift in its course, for it makes the circuit of the heavens and returns to its place in one day.⁸

35 Is he not great who does these things? But truth is great, and stronger than all things.

36 The whole earth calls upon truth, and heaven blesses her. All God's works quake and tremble, and with him there is nothing unrighteous.

37 Wine is unrighteous, the king is unrighteous, women are unrighteous, all the sons of men are unrighteous, all their works are unrighteous, and all such things. There is no truth in them and in their unrighteousness they will perish.⁹

38 But truth endures and is strong for ever, and lives and prevails for ever and ever.

39 With her there is no partiality or preference, but she does what is righteous instead of anything that is unrighteous or wicked. All men approve her deeds,

40 and there is nothing unrighteous in her judgment. To her belongs the strength and the kingship and the power and the majesty of all the ages. Blessed be the God of truth!"

41 He ceased speaking; then all the people shouted, and said, "Great is truth, and strongest of all!"

42 Then the king said to him, "Ask what you wish, even beyond what is written, and we will give it to you, for you have been found to be the wisest. And you shall sit next to me, and be called my kinsman."¹⁰

43 Then he said to the king, "Remember the vow which you made to build Jerusalem, in the day when you became king,

44 and to send back all the vessels that were taken from Jerusalem, which Cyrus set apart when he began to destroy Babylon, and vowed to send them back there.

45 You also vowed to build the temple, which the Edomites burned when Judea was laid waste by the Chaldeans.

46 And now, O lord the king, this is what I ask and request of you, and this befits your greatness. I pray therefore that you fulfil the vow whose fulfilment you vowed to the King of heaven with your own lips."

47 Then Darius the king rose, and kissed him, and wrote letters for him to all the treasurers and governors and generals and satraps, that they should give escort to him and all who were going up with him to build Jerusalem.

48 And he wrote letters to all the governors in Coelesyria and Phoenicia and to those in Lebanon, to bring cedar timber from Lebanon to Jerusalem, and to help him build the city.¹¹

49 And he wrote for all the Jews who were going up from his kingdom to Judea, in the interest of their freedom, that no officer or satrap or governor or treasurer should forcibly enter their doors;

⁷ Apame, a common female Persian name, is not mentioned by historians. After all she is only Darius' concubine, not his wife. Zerubbabel mentions her because she is the perfect example of his point--as he is about to explain.

⁸ Zerubbabel might have Ps 19:6 in mind.

⁹ Zerubbabel is also familiar with any of these passages: Ps 14:1-3, 53:1-3, and Ecc 7:20.

¹⁰ It is at this time that Zerubbabel can position himself to become the next king of the Persian Empire.

¹¹ These three areas border Judah to the north. Coelesyria is now called Coele-Syria.

50 that all the country which they would occupy should be theirs without tribute; that the Idumeans should give up the villages of the Jews which they held;

51 that twenty talents a year should be given for the building of the temple until it was completed,

52 and an additional ten talents a year for burnt offerings to be offered on the altar every day, in accordance with the commandment to make seventeen offerings;

53 and that all who came from Babylonia to build the city should have their freedom, they and their children and all the priests who came.

54 He wrote also concerning their support and the priests' garments in which they were to minister.

55 He wrote that the support for the Levites should be provided until the day when the temple should be finished and Jerusalem built.

56 He wrote that land and wages should be provided for all who guarded the city.

57 And he sent back from Babylon all the vessels which Cyrus had set apart; everything that Cyrus had ordered to be done, he also commanded to be done and to be sent to Jerusalem.

58 When the young man went out, he lifted up his face to heaven toward Jerusalem, and praised the King of heaven, saying,

59 "From thee is the victory; from thee is wisdom, and thine is the glory. I am thy servant.

60 Blessed art thou, who hast given me wisdom; I give thee thanks, O Lord of our fathers."

61 So he took the letters, and went to Babylon and told this to all his brethren.

62 And they praised the God of their fathers, because he had given them release and permission

63 to go up and build Jerusalem and the temple which is called by his name; and they feasted, with music and rejoicing, for seven days.

5:1-6

1 After this the heads of fathers' houses were chosen to go up, according to their tribes, with their wives and sons and daughters, and their menservants and maidservants, and their cattle.

2 And Darius sent with them a thousand horsemen to take them back to Jerusalem in safety, with the music of drums and flutes;

3 and all their brethren were making merry. And he made them go up with them.

4 These are the names of the men who went up, according to their fathers' houses in the tribes, over their groups:

5 the priests, the sons of Phinehas, son of Aaron; Jeshua the son of Jozadak, son of Seraiah, and Joakim the son of Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, of the house of David, of the lineage of Phares, of the tribe of Judah,¹²

6 who spoke wise words before Darius the king of the Persians, in the second year of his reign, in the month of Nisan, the first month.¹³

¹² (1) Once in Judah, Jeshua would be the high priest. He is the son of Jozadak son of Seraiah... son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar son of Aaron. Ezra writes that he himself is the son of Seraiah (Ezra 7:1). Therefore, Ezra is Jeshua's uncle. The missing generations between Seraiah and Phinehas are found in Ezra 7:1-5.

(2) Zerubbabel is mentioned in 1Chr 3:17-19. Here, he is the son of Pedaiah and the nephew of Shealtiel. It is believed that Shealtiel died without children, therefore, Zerubbabel is the natural son of Pedaiah and legal son (and natural nephew) of Shealtiel. This seems to be verified by this verse if "Phares" is another name for Pedaiah.

¹³ 1 Esdras is one of the books found in the Septuagint Old Testament. 1 Esdras chapter 1 is the exact same as 2Chr 35-36. 1 Esdras chapter 2 is the exact same as Ezra chapter 1. 1 Esdras 5:7 and following is the exact same as Ezra 2:1 and following. With the exception of the two chapters and six verses you just read, 1 Esdras and Ezra are mostly identical with one exception: 1Esdras does not contain Ezra 4:6-23. Chronologically, Ezra 4:6-23--which is about Jerusalem's wall and not the temple--occurs during the time of Nehemiah and Artaxerxes I.

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* Commentary notes added by Andrew Swango.