

The Darius Contest

1 Esdras 3:1 – 5:3

by Don Falkos

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Shortly after Darius became king of Persia, he oversaw a contest between three of his bodyguards. Each was to state the one thing he considered to be superior to all others.

The first young man said, "The king is superior! Everyone knows that. Everyone obeys the king – whether they're powerful or weak, rich or poor."

The second young man said, "Wine is superior! It warps the mind of all who drink it – even the king."

The third young man, named Zerubbabel, said, "The king is great. And wine is strong. But women are superior. Women give birth to kings and raise the men who grow grapes to make wine. A man will gawk at a beautiful woman and give up everything for her. The king's mistress will snatch his crown from his head and put it on her own, yet he won't scold her. If she smiles at him, he laughs. If she's angry with him, he'll do anything to win back her favor. Women are superior, and God's truth conquers all."

King Darius proclaimed Zerubbabel the winner and said, "Ask for whatever you want."

Zerubbabel replied, "Your majesty, almost twenty years ago, King Cyrus issued a proclamation that the Temple of God in Jerusalem be rebuilt. The Temple is still unfinished. I would like to complete it."

Darius provided funding for the project. He gave Zerubbabel letters of introduction that ordered the Persian governors and administrators in Judah to help finance the building.

Zerubbabel went to Babylon, organized a large group of returnees, and set off for Jerusalem with a military escort provided by the king.