
Day 268 - September 25

Period of Restoration (535-425 BCE)
Opposition to Temple's Construction

Readings: *Ezra 4:6-6:13*

Reflections:

- Construction on this new, smaller temple stops between 536 and 522 BCE. Cyrus dies during this time (530 BCE) and for seven years his son Cambyses gives leadership. Like his father, he is basically a good man and a good ruler. He is referred to here as Xerxes which is more of a title for the position than a reference to his name. The temple construction stops for two primary reasons. First, opposition by Israel's enemies. Second, people need to take time to build their own homes and re-establish their own communities.
- Although there was a local appeal for official intervention by Cambyses to stop the construction apparently no response was given. Cambyses launches an assault on Egypt and its rulers, Pharaoh Amasis and his son Psamtik II, in 525 BCE. While he is on a campaign securing Memphis first and then the rest of Egypt, his half-brother Smerdis is killed by Cambyses' aides to prevent a coup. Yet, Guamata, a Mede who claimed to be Smerdis does in fact lead a revolt and claim power for about ten months. It is during this time further correspondence happens addressed to Guamata as Artaxerxes. Again, this is a title and not his name. In the coming decades Persian leaders by the name Xerxes and Artaxerxes should not be confused with these leaders.
- The enemies of Israel appeal to this Artaxerxes saying that the people of the city Jerusalem are a rebellious people. In a sense, this would be true in that they claimed to follow only one God and had a sense of unique destiny as an independent people worshipping the one true God. This was not a nation that was easily integrated into other culture. This is a reminder that people who live as counter-culture people giving loyalty to God alone are often viewed as being rebellious. We will see this in the early centuries of the church.
- Now two things happen that get the construction on the temple going again. First, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah begin to work with the people to get it restarted. "And the prophets of God were with them, helping them." For the purposes of God to be fulfilled, spiritual leaders need to play their own roles in being catalysts for action. Second, Cambyses dies (possibly by suicide) and a distant relative of his, Darius, overthrows Guamata and takes

control of the empire in 522 BCE. He pulls together the empire under a new law and helps to restore order.

- Tattenai, the local governor of the Trans-Euphrates now gets involved and questions the Jewish people's authority to build this temple. He checks with Darius, the records are searched, and Cyrus's original decree is found. Darius then orders financial support for this rebuild in line with the order of Cyrus. This was not unusual as the kings wanted to secure the favor of all the gods and so it is obvious they wanted to keep the "God of Heaven" happy.
- This is a reminder that God can work through people's misconceptions and misunderstandings to still accomplish his will. People can be motivated by all the wrong reasons and still find themselves serving the purposes of God. When we are faced with enemies we can remember that God's purposes will prevail. We don't have to fight people; we can trust God to work, even if it means working through people with completely wrong motives.