

Ezra 4:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

Strategic Opposition Through Political Channels: This verse describes sustained, organized opposition to the rebuilding of Jerusalem's temple (538-520 BC). The Hebrew phrase "vesokhrim alehem yo'atsim" (וְסִכְּרִים אֶלֵהֶם יוֹאֲצִים) means "and they hired against them counselors." The verb "sakhar" (סִכַּר, to hire) indicates paid opposition—these weren't spontaneous objections but calculated political and legal maneuvers. The "counselors" (יוֹאֲצִים, yo'atsim) were likely Persian officials, lawyers, or lobbyists who could influence imperial decisions against the Jews.

The Intent to Frustrate: The purpose clause "lehafir atsatham" (לְהַפִּיר אֶת־סָתָם) means "to frustrate/nullify their purpose/counsel." The verb "hafir" (הִפִּיר) means to break, frustrate, make void, or nullify—the same word used for breaking covenants or making plans ineffective. The noun "atsah" (אֶצָּה, purpose/plan/counsel) refers to the Jews' determination to rebuild the temple according to Cyrus's decree (Ezra 1:1-4). The opposition sought not just to delay but to completely nullify the building project, using bureaucratic and legal obstacles.

The Duration of Opposition: The time phrase "kol yemei Koresh melek Paravesh ad malkhut Daryavesh melek Paravesh" (כָּל יְמֵי כּוֹרֶשׁ מֶלֶךְ-פָּרָשׁ וְעַד-מַלְכוּת דָּרְיָוֶשׁ מֶלֶךְ-פָּרָשׁ) spans "all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia"—approximately 538 to 520 BC, nearly two decades. This persistent opposition eventually succeeded in stopping the work (Ezra 4:24) until prophetic

encouragement from Haggai and Zechariah restarted it (Ezra 5:1-2). The verse illustrates how spiritual work faces sustained opposition requiring perseverance and divine intervention to overcome.

Historical Context

This verse occurs within the complex narrative of the Jewish return from Babylonian exile. In 538 BC, Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon and issued a decree allowing exiled peoples to return home and rebuild their temples—a policy of religious tolerance designed to stabilize his vast empire. About 50,000 Jews returned under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:64-65), beginning temple reconstruction in 536 BC.

The opposition came from "the people of the land" (Ezra 4:4)—likely Samaritans and other groups settled in the region by Assyria after the northern kingdom's fall in 722 BC. These groups had syncretistic religious practices, mixing worship of YHWH with pagan elements. When the Jews refused their offer to help build the temple (Ezra 4:2-3), maintaining religious purity, the opposition turned hostile. They wrote accusatory letters to Persian authorities (Ezra 4:6-16), falsely claiming the Jews were rebuilding Jerusalem's walls to prepare rebellion—a serious charge that would threaten imperial security and tax revenue.

The hired counselors exploited Persian bureaucracy and political instability. Cyrus died in 530 BC; his son Cambyses II reigned until 522 BC; then after brief turmoil, Darius I (Darius the Great) took power in 522 BC and consolidated control by 520 BC. During this instability, opponents successfully got the work stopped. However, in 520 BC, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah stirred the people to resume building despite opposition (Ezra 5:1-2, Haggai 1:1-15). Darius investigated, found Cyrus's original decree, and ordered the work to continue with imperial funding (Ezra 6:1-12). The temple was completed in 516 BC (Ezra 6:15), exactly seventy years after its destruction in 586 BC, fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy (Jeremiah 25:11-12, 29:10). This narrative demonstrates how God's purposes prevail despite persistent opposition, using even pagan rulers to accomplish His redemptive plans.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What does this verse teach about the nature of opposition to God's work—that it is often organized, sustained, and uses 'legitimate' channels?
2. How can believers maintain perseverance in God's calling when facing prolonged, strategic opposition?
3. What principles can be drawn from the Jews' refusal to compromise with syncretistic neighbors, even when it increased opposition?
4. How does God's sovereignty over pagan rulers (Cyrus, Darius) demonstrate His control over history to accomplish redemptive purposes?
5. In what ways does this narrative prepare us to understand spiritual warfare and opposition to gospel work in every age?

Interlinear Text

וְסָכְרִים	עֲלֵיהֶם	יוֹעֲצֵי	לְהִפָּרֵם	עֲצָתָם	כָּל
And hired	H5921	counsellors	against them to frustrate	their purpose	H3605
H7936		H3289	H6565	H6098	

יָמָיו	כֹּהֵן	מֶלֶךְ	פָּרְסִי	וְעַד	מֶלֶךְ	וְשֵׁן
all the days	of Cyrus	king	of Persia	H5704	even until the reign	of Darius
H3117	H3566	H4428	H6539		H4438	H1867

מֶלֶךְ	פָּרְסִי
king	of Persia
H4428	H6539

Additional Cross-References

Nahum 1:11 (Parallel theme): There is one come out of thee, that imagineth evil against the LORD, a wicked counsellor.

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