

'Starting again'

Returning to life after lockdown

"Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? But now be strong ..." (Haggai 2.3f)

As the lockdown restrictions are gradually eased and we return bit by bit to the rhythms of congregational life, the return of the exiles from Babylon provides an instructive, parallel narrative.

The return from Babylon was both gradual and difficult: it's narrated in the two books Ezra and Nehemiah (which were originally one book), and the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah had an integral part to play in the challenges facing the people back then.

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8. Stirring words!

"Haggai .. and Zechariah prophesied to the Jews .."

Ezra 5.1-5

This chapter picks up where the previous one left off. The second year of Darius was 520 BC, some 18 years or so after the exiles had returned and laid the foundation of the temple.

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1. Read Ezra 5.1-5. The work of God is never without opposition so if you wait until it dies away before you get to work, you'll never get up and running at all!

What sort of opposition have you encountered as you've sought to further God's work of renewal in your life?

Can you think of times when the ministry of the Word of God stirred you into action? What was it about that ministry of His Word which the Lord used to that effect?

2. Read Ezra 5.1. Against the backdrop of the previous 18 years when there had been no progress, God raised up a couple of men to bring His Word to the people, and through them to trigger action.

The fact that there were two men raised up by God at this time to bring His Word would have reinforced its impact: what parallels to this might we draw today?

We're told that they prophesied 'in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them': what does that tell us about *their* ministry, and the ministry of the Word of God today?

3. Read Ezra 5.2. Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the priest, led by example in restarting the work of building the temple, supported by the two prophets.

Zerubbabel and Joshua set to work in response to the prophets' message which was directed to them by name: do you respond better when you are *specifically* asked to do something?

In what way do you think the prophets would have been 'supporting' them?

4. Read Ezra 5.3-5. No sooner had the work begun than the opposition raised its head again, challenging their authorization to build and looking for the names of all those involved.

In what ways have you experienced opposition in the service of Christ?

What encouragement do you draw from these verses as you face different challenges in the work of the Lord?