

'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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11. Expectancy

"From this day on I will bless you"

Haggai 2.10-19

As believers we have every reason to be expectant! But it's always important that our expectancy is informed and defined by the clear teaching of the Bible – otherwise disillusionment will soon kick in.

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1. Read Haggai 2.10-19. This third message of the prophet is an 'interactive' one, which starts with him asking a couple of questions – which prompt the priests to do some hard thinking!

How would you summarise the thrust of this third message?

How fruitful would you say you are, and have been, in the service of the Lord Jesus?

Does the final sentence excite you today?

2. Read Haggai 2.10. The message is again precisely dated, two months after Haggai's previous message, and three months after the work on the temple had re-started (see 1.15).

Are you naturally impatient? And are you disappointed when the Lord isn't quick to answer your prayers and to work very obviously in your life?

What helps you persevere in the Lord's service, even when you don't see much progress?

3. Read Haggai 2.11-14. Haggai asked the priests a couple of questions, the answer to each of which would have been easy for them (they'd have known Lev.6.27 and Nu.19,13 & 22).

Why does Haggai focus on the relative 'infectivity' of the laws relating to ritual defilement and consecration?

How might the lesson Haggai draws from these questions be applied to ourselves today – as individuals, as a church, as a nation?

4. Read Haggai 2.15-19. The heart of this third message is now spelled out by Haggai: they were to 'give careful thought' to their experience over the past years, and respond in faith and hope.

What challenge does the Lord set out in v.17, and how might that be applicable (if at all) today?

How *expectant* are you? And how (if at all!) has studying this message affected your expectancy?