

'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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12. Security

".. I will make you like My signet ring .."

Haggai 2.20-23

This short, final message given brought by Haggai brings together in a concise and summary form the thrust of the previous messages: this is why God's people can 'be strong .. and work' (see 2.4).

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1. Read Haggai 2.20-23. Like the first message (see 1.1), this final message is addressed specifically to Zerubbabel the governor of Judah at the time.

What is the encouragement God was giving to Zerubbabel?

Why would he have needed encouragement?

(Leaders as much as their people need encouragement. Take time to pray for your leaders – in the nation and in the church)

2. Read Haggai 2.20. If teaching can be said to bring people to the word of the Lord, preaching, by contrast, sees the word of the Lord being brought to the people (see the wording of 1.1,3; 2.1,10,20).

How would you explain the difference between teaching and preaching to a friend who enquired?

Read **Ezra 5.1-2** again: in what ways (if any!) has the preaching of the word of the Lord over these last weeks challenged and encouraged you and spurred you into action?

3. Read Haggai 2.21-22. Haggai brought Zerubbabel the promise that as the people applied themselves to the work of rebuilding the temple, God Himself would be very much at work.

What is the great reality which lies behind this promise?

How does that abiding truth encourage you today in your own present circumstances?

4. Read Haggai 2.23. God's final message through Haggai ends with a word of assurance which clearly applied to Zerubbabel himself, but also pointed beyond him to the Messiah.

What was the assurance which the Lord was giving to Zerubbabel, and how would this have encouraged the man?

How does this final verse point you to Jesus?