

# '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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## 14. King of kings

*".. the king issued a decree .."*

Ezra 6.1-12

Through His prophet the Lord had reassured the people, 'I am with you' (Hag.1.13, 2.4): knowing He was with them made the world of difference – now they began to see what 'God with us' means!

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**1. Read Ezra 6.1-12.** Officialdom had tried to put the brakes on the re-building of the temple with a letter to the king of Persia: in his reply he effectively put his foot on the accelerator!

What are we being taught by God through this passage?

How does the message of these verses apply to you, and to ourselves as a fellowship, in today's circumstances?

**2. Read Ezra 6.1-5.** The relevant scroll relating to the rebuilding of the temple was found some 300 miles away from Babylon itself at Ecbatana, which had quite probably been the capital of Cyrus.

In what ways is the sovereignty of God seen to be operative in what's narrated in these verses?

Today we're very aware, in a very different situation, of governments legislating in regard to the worship of God's people: what light (if any) do these verses shed on that issue?

**3. Read Ezra 6.6-10.** The attempt on the part of the enemies of the returned exiles to hinder the work of God completely backfired – and served only to prosper that work all the more!

In what different ways did the king's decree here strengthen the hands of the exiles as they applied themselves to the work of rebuilding the temple?

What other instances can you think of in which the Lord turned a situation so remarkably on its head?

Why was the king so keen to have the temple built?

**4. Read Ezra 6.11-12** Along with the clear instructions which the king gave the officials, he specified with stringent sanctions what the consequences of their disobedience would be.

To what extent do you think that Daniel's long and faithful ministry in exile resulted in the king, Darius, being so adamant about the work to be done in Jerusalem?

**Read Daniel 6.1-10:** What's the significance of the fact that Daniel's praying was significantly '*towards Jerusalem*'? How does that challenge or excite you in regard to your own praying?