

‘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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15. Building

“.. continued to build and prosper ..”

Ezra 6.13-18

Jesus declared that He would build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it: as His followers we share in that work, and thus find ourselves involved in a great building project!

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1. Read Ezra 6.13-18. Between the rebuilding of the temple and the subsequent restoring of the walls the exiles were involved one way or another in ‘building’ – a picture of Christian ministry.

What would you say you are ‘building’ with your life?

How do you understand yourself to be contributing to Jesus' building of His church?

2. Read Ezra 6.13-14a. These verses have reference to the temple and its being rebuilt by the exiles: government decrees, and the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah, alike facilitated the work.

What part (if any) should the State (King Darius) play in the work of God's people today?

In what ways does the preaching of the Word of God issue in the prospering of the work of God?

3. Read Ezra 6.14b. There was building work going on in the city, right on through to the reign of Artaxerxes: all of that is summarized in a few words – 'they built and they finished'.

Why do you think Ezra (the author) makes reference at this point to the decrees of these three kings?

God is building out of His people a 'temple' which will display His glory: in what ways does v.14b encourage you?

4. Read Ezra 6.15-18. The completion of the rebuilding of the temple marked a significant milestone for the exiles: they were glad to celebrate it, and careful to do so in line with Gods Word.

What would you say were the main characteristics of their celebration of 'the dedication of the house of God'?

How might that inform our own thinking when it comes to the celebration of significant events in the work of God?