

# '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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## 16. Celebration

*".. the exiles celebrated the Passover .."*

Ezra 6.19-22

Just a few weeks after the temple had been completed (see vv.15 & 19) the exiles were able to celebrate the annual Passover, commemorating their deliverance from slavery.

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**1. Read Ezra 6.19-22.** The Passover was an annual reminder of the rescuing activity of God: keeping the Passover enabled the exiles to see their own return as a second exodus.

We've not been able to celebrate the NT equivalent of this sacrament over these months: what do you miss about that?

What adjectives would you use to describe the way in which the Passover was kept as recorded here? Do you celebrate the sacrament similarly?

**2. Read Ezra 6.19-20.** Adar (6.15) was the last month of the year, Nissan the first: you'll find instructions regarding the Passover given in Exodus 12.1-6 and Lev.23.4ff.

From your reading of the first 6 chapters of Ezra what are the parallels between the experience of the exiles and the exodus celebrated in the Passover?

In what ways do you think our return from the restrictions of these past months will or could represent a 'new start'?

**3. Read Ezra 6.21.** The reference here to those who participated in the celebration of the Passover highlights key components in the way the sacrament was (and was to be) observed.

What do you learn about the people who ate the Passover lamb?

What lessons are there for you in this verse?

**4. Read Ezra 6.22.** The Festival of Unleavened Bread was the immediate sequel to the Passover (see Lev.23.4-8), one of the three great festivals at which the Jews gathered in Jerusalem.

What has the Lord done which fills you with joy?

And in what ways has the Lord filled us with joy as a local fellowship in recent days, prompting us also to celebrate?