

Going Home

The Temple Completed

Foundation

Bible passage : Haggai & Ezra 5-6

Powerpoint: ExileAndReturn-08. Foundations replaced by new Temple.

When: Another fifteen years have passed. Israel was still part of the empire of the Medes and Persians ruled by another Darius not to be confused with the one we met in Daniel.

Time to act: God had blessed the people by allowing them to return from exile and live in Jerusalem and the surrounding area but as we saw in the previous unit they had not trusted Him. They had laid foundations for the Temple but when opposition arose they had just given in. In the meantime their houses were finished but they seem to have been struggling in the land (Hag 1.5-6) and they were saying that it was not yet time to rebuild the Temple (Hag 1.2). Therefore, the Lord sent them a prophet, Haggai, (Hag 1.3) to rebuke them and to stir them up.

“Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your panelled houses, while this house lies in ruins?”

God does not live in temples, or churches, but the Temple in Jerusalem was a sign that God was with the people. It was as if God had sent them back from exile, but didn't really want God with them. They were concerned with their lives and homes and welfare but not with God's will. Many can be exactly the same today and indeed in the New Testament Paul lamented that people were concerned with their own interests and not those of Christ (Phil 2.21).



Seal of Darius the Great in the British Museum.

The people had been blessed but they were not content, they were restless and in fact didn't have enough food or clothes to keep them warm (Hag 1.6). This was God's doing, because they had not obeyed Him, in order to make them see that they were doing wrong.

Rebuilding at last: Stirred up by the message through Haggai the people began the work on the Temple afresh. When they were challenged again, rather than back down, as happened previously, they refused to stop (Ezra 5.5). As a result word was again sent to the King. Not knowing the details King Darius had a search made in the records. In God's providence this did not turn up the instruction of Artaxerxes, to stop the building, but the earlier instruction of Cyrus, that the Temple should be rebuilt. Therefore Darius commanded that the work should continue and those who had opposed it could no longer stop it (Ezra 5.5ff).

God is King: The Temple was therefore rebuilt and finished in about 516BC some seventy years after it had been destroyed. It was a sign to the people that God was with them and in Old Testament times it was an important centre for worship.



Concern for their own interests meant the people did not obey God until He stirred them up through Haggai.