

SERMON NOTES Sunday 2nd November 2025

sunnysidechurch

Introduction to Haggai

Nebuchadnezzar was the longest reigning King of Babylon. He defeated the Assyrians, the Egyptians and finally the Southern Kingdom of Judah. He destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem in 586BC, sacking its treasures and exiling the strongest of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. This left only the weak and elderly, so the Temple was never rebuilt.

The Jews at that time believed [as did the surrounding pagan tribes] that God had a limited sphere of influence. So not only were they separated from their homeland, but also from the presence of their God. The prophet Jeremiah prophesied [Jeremiah 29:10] that the Lord would enable the exiles to return after 70 years and so it happened that Cyrus, who had defeated the Babylonians and established the Persian Empire, allowed the exiles to return to Jerusalem to build a new Temple in 538BC.

The Jewish exiles wouldn't allow any of the neighbouring tribes, who worshipped their own gods, to help with the rebuilding, as they wanted the Temple to be kept pure for their Lord. This stirred up trouble, until the pagans persuaded the new Persian King, Artaxerxes that the Temple would syphon off taxes from his coffers, and so he issued a decree that the work should stop.

In 458BC Haggai, the prophet, persuaded the people that the Lord wanted them to continue the work, but the surrounding nations once again objected and demanded to know by what authority they were doing this work. Haggai went with the High Priest and Governor of Jerusalem to the new King Darius, to ask him to search for the original proclamation that King Cyrus had made. Having done this Darius ordered that the Jews alone should begin again to rebuild and anyone interfering would be punished.

Read Ezra 6:13-18

The Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai, but Haggai wasn't satisfied that the people were doing their best, and compared the new building with the magnificence of Solomon's Temple and also with their own dwellings. He also implied that the Temple should be fit, on the Day of Judgement, for the prophesied coming of the Messiah.

On completion of the Temple the people celebrated by bringing offerings and sacrifices, as was their custom, including a 'sin offering' for each of the Tribes of Jacob. Perhaps they had begun to realise that their time in exile had been a consequence of their past misdoings, and not that God had abandoned them. Haggai taught that honouring God by rebuilding the Temple and reinstating acceptable worship was the only way to get their lives back on an even keel.

As it says in Matthew 6:33 'But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.'

Questions for housegroups:

- 1 Read the whole of Ezra chapter 6. Does anything in particular stand out for you?
- 2 In what ways can we best honour God?
- 3 How can we best respond to the command in Matthew 6:33?
- 4 How easy is it to follow Jesus' teaching in today's society?
- 5 Is there anything else in the passage or from the sermon or the service that you would like to discuss?
- 6 Try to read the whole of Haggai before next Sunday.