

Rebuilding the Temple

Ezra 1-6 / Haggai 1-2

Jeremiah had said Judah would be in captivity for 70 years. At the end of that time, the king of Persia said, “The Lord has told me to send his people back to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple. Therefore, they’re free to go and build the house of God.”

The king gave gold and silver for the project, and he gave back the temple vessels taken when Jerusalem was destroyed. He donated money to buy cedar from Lebanon to panel the inside of the temple. He even provided livestock so the people could make sacrifices to God. The Lord stirred the hearts of his people. Many accepted the challenge to go back to Judah to do the work of God. Some, who couldn’t go themselves, gave money and supplies.

When the people arrived, they made sacrifices to God on the temple site. They shouted for joy, and then they began to build the temple.

The other people living there were upset that the Jews had returned. They tried to stop the building, but nothing worked. Finally, a new king ruled over Persia. They sent him a message and slanted the news about the new temple. They convinced this king to stop the building of the temple.

The Jewish builders had no choice but to stop and wait. But this now gave them an opportunity to build their own houses. Before long, one family after another had used the cedar paneling in their own homes until all of it was gone. They knew they could never replace this so whenever someone talked about beginning to build again on the temple, they would say, “Now is not a good time to build.”

The prophet Haggai said to the people, “I have a message from the Lord. “Consider your ways. You say it isn’t time to build the house of God. Yet you live in houses paneled in cedar while my house lies in ruins. Consider how you have fared. You have sown much and harvested little; you eat, but remain hungry; you drink, but never have your fill; you clothe yourselves but are never warm; and you earn wages but put them into a bag not knowing there is a hole in it.”

The people listened but they knew there wasn’t any cedar to finish the temple. Haggai said, “Thus says the Lord God, ‘Go up into the hills and bring common wood and build the house so that I might take pleasure in it and be honored.’” So, the people obeyed and went into the hills to gather wood to replace the missing cedar.

In time another king came to power in Persia and gave the order, “Anyone who opposes the building of the temple will be put to death.” With this decree, the people living around Jerusalem could no longer hinder the construction.

The people worked with enthusiasm. Haggai came with another message from the Lord. “I am pleased with your obedience. Look how I provide for you. You haven’t planted seeds, the vines haven’t brought forth grapes, and your trees haven’t bloomed. Yet you are harvesting my blessings and provisions.”

Most of the people were happy when they saw the temple nearing completion, but some of the older men said, “We remember Solomon’s temple. It was a thing of beauty. This temple is small and lacks beauty.”

Haggai came with another message from the Lord. “Who is left among you that saw my house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Take courage, all of you. Work, for I am with you according to the promise I made when I delivered you from Egypt. In a little while I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, and I will fill this house with splendor.”

“The silver is mine, and the gold is mine,” says the Lord of hosts. The future glory of this Temple will be greater than its past glory, and in this place, I will give prosperity.”