

THE GOOD HAND OF GOD RESTORING AND PRESERVING HIS PEOPLE (A Study of Ezra, Nehemiah, & Esther)

Lesson Five: Choosing God's Priorities (Ezra 5)

INTRODUCTION: There is a tendency, once restored to God following a time of backsliding, to become so overjoyed with God's forgiveness and confident in God's presence, to imagine you've reached a place where difficulties are all in the past. But you soon find otherwise, as did the Jews who returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple following their captivity in Babylon. Their initial euphoria of returning to God soon evaporated from disappointment and opposition, resulting in the work on the temple being stopped for sixteen years. During those sixteen years their priorities turned upside down as they ceased caring about God's kingdom and started building their own. To address their spiritual complacency and misplaced priorities God raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. Through the preaching of these two men, the Jewish community repented of their neglect of God, returned to choosing God's priorities, & completed the work on the temple.

1. GOD'S WORD WORKING IN HIS PEOPLE

When the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them, then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them supporting them.

Ezra 5: 1-2

- Haggai's first message (1:1-15) was given on Aug. 29, 520BC, sixteen years after the work on the temple ceased. Heart of message: **REBUKE**

"Consider your ways!...and rebuild the temple that I may be pleased with it and be glorified," says the Lord.

Haggai 1: 7-8

Work on temple was resumed 23 days after Haggai's message on Sept. 21, 520BC. The temple was completed four & a half years later on March 12, 515BC.

- Haggai's second message (2: 1-9) was given on Oct. 17, a month and a half after work on the temple was resumed. Heart of message: **ENCOURAGEMENT**

"...all you people of the land take courage... and work... for I am with you," says the Lord of hosts.

Haggai 2: 4

- Haggai's third message (2: 10-19) was given on Dec. 18, three months after the work on the temple was resumed. Heart of message: **BLESSING**

...from this day on I will bless you.

Haggai 2: 19

- Haggai's fourth message (2: 20-23) was given on the same day as his third message. Heart of message: ASSURANCE

"I will take you...and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you," declares the Lord of hosts. Haggai 2: 23

- Zechariah's first message (1: 1-6) was given within days of Haggai's second message. Heart of message: RETURN TO ME

"Return to Me," declares the Lord of hosts, "that I may return to you." Zechariah 1: 3

- Zechariah's seven visions (1: 7- 6: 15) were given two months after Haggai's last message which would have been five months into the work on the temple. Heart of message: God's unfailing FAITHFULNESS to Zion.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, "I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and Zion..." Therefore thus says the Lord, "I will return to Jerusalem with compassion; My house will be built in it," declares the Lord of hosts.

Zechariah 1: 14 & 16

- Zechariah's four messages (Zechariah 7-8) were given two years after his visions and two years before the work on the temple was completed. Heart of messages: The Lord is to be the CENTER of our lives & REASON for our actions (7: 4-7), and the SORROWS of God's past judgment become the PLEDGES of God's future blessings (8: 1-3; 14-17).

2. GOD'S EYE WATCHING OVER HIS PEOPLE

But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until a report could come to Darius, and then a written reply be returned concerning it. Ezra 5: 5

- The word "stop" in verse five indicates God's providence not only PROVIDES what is needed to accomplish His plans, but also PREVENTS things from happening that would otherwise block His plans (Psalm 124).

3. GOD'S PEOPLE WITNESSING TO GOD'S SUPREMACY

Thus they answered us, saying, "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth and are rebuilding the temple..." Ezra 5: 11

- When threatened by a suspicious ruler, the small Jewish remnant resist the temptation of political correctness & boldly confess the God they serve is the one true God and Ruler of heaven and earth. What mattered most to the returned exiles now, was not their homes or livelihood, but the priority of worshiping God as their FIRST LOVE.