

Don't Make God's Big Things Small

The Story: part 19

February 19, 2017

DAY ONE: King Cyrus sends the Jews home to re-build the temple

1. As we continue our march through the Old Testament, and God's larger story, don't you wonder how the thread of God's redemptive story doesn't just snap and break? Good grief! Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel were lost to history. Only two remained, and then they were conquered and most of the them were carried off into captivity into Babylon.

2. But history takes a sudden turn. Persia defeats the world power Babylon, and King Cyrus is now the king of the block. The year is 536 B.C. (The last of the three Babylonian captivities was in 586 B.C.)

Ezra 1:1 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing:

² "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.

³ Anyone of his people among you--may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem.

⁴ And the people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem."

3. These four verses are packed with stunners!

a. How in the world did a pagan king like Cyrus ever decide to send the Jews back to their land? (v. 1)

b. Something happened to King Cyrus! (Read verse 2). What did he understand God to be doing through him?

c. King Cyrus gives God's people an assignment that could only be understood as a miracle or "a God-thing." (v. 3) What two things are they to do?

d. King Cyrus not only frees the Jews, he tells them to build the temple at God's behest, and now the king tells the people of his nation to provide the building supplies, goods and food, and whatever is needed for temple service! (v. 4)

4. What's your biggest take away from today's devotional?

DAY TWO: “Rebuild the altar.” The centrality of dealing with sin

1. The first group of Jews, about fifty thousand, returned to Jerusalem. Surprisingly, they had their priorities straight! Notice what they set out to do, first!

Ezra 3:1 When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled as one man in Jerusalem.

² Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses the man of God.

³ Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and evening sacrifices.

2. What did they build, first? (v. 2)

3. What was motivating them to build the altar? (v. 2)

4. What was the purpose of building the altar? (v. 3)

5. Upon their return to Jerusalem they discovered opposition from the surrounding people, the Samaritans. Jerusalem had been burned to the ground, the great city wall was rubble, and there was no army. Yet, they continued their important re-building. How did they persevere through trouble?

6. Why did God put such importance on the people rebuilding the altar, and the temple? Why didn't he have them first rebuild the wall to protect them from neighboring enemies?

7. Why was the altar important? What role did the altar play in dealing with the problem of sin? (Remember the requirement of a blood sacrifice for the remission of sin)

8. Why was the temple important? What did it represent?

9. The message is clear—the centrality of the people's on-going need to deal rightly with forgiveness of their sin. God would take care of them against their enemies, but if they didn't get their relationship back to Square One, no high walls could protect them!

DAY THREE: The people derail themselves, again!

1. Though the people got off to a good start in rebuilding the temple, their resolve slowly waned, the project slowed down, and then stopped—for sixteen years!

2. God sends yet another prophet, Haggai.

Haggai 1:1 In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest:

² This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.'"

³ Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai:

⁴ "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"

3. Haggai pinpoints the people's excuse or rationalization for no longer working on the temple. Go back and underline it in v. 2.

4. Rewrite their excuse in your own words.

5. What strikes you about their excuse?

6. Can you think of a time when you made a similar excuse with what God wanted you to do? What was the situation?

7. Their excuse was a mask for their real priorities. Haggai pinpoints the disconnect.

a. What was their real commitment to rebuilding the temple?

b. What was their real commitment to their homes?

8. How would you describe your real commitment to God and your real commitment to building your own life?

DAY 4: God goes to work to change their priorities and values, through money

1. One of my mentors used to tell me, “Seth, it’s not that Christians don’t love Jesus. It’s that they love something else just a little more than Jesus.”

2. Such is the case in Jerusalem, as the people put “on hold” the building of the temple, while they not only built their homes, but were in process of “upgrading” them.

3. God speaks through the prophet Haggai to the people.

Haggai 1:5 Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. ⁶ You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."

4. What is it God wants His people to ponder? (v. 5)

Haggai 1:7 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. ⁸ Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the LORD.

5. Here is the crux of the matter. While the people gave “lip service” to God, what they valued more than God was themselves. So, God goes to work...

Haggai 1:9 "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. ¹⁰ Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. ¹¹ I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands."

4. How does God deal with them valuing their possessions more than Him? Underline every action He took (vv. 9-11). Which one stood out the most, to you?

5. Has God seemed to deal this way with you? If so, what have you experienced or observed?

6. How would you categorize the lesson the people needed to learn?

DAY FIVE: Paving the way for the coming Messiah

1. The people finally finish rebuilding the temple. Meanwhile, Haggai the prophet has another prophecy, filled with wonder!

Haggai 2:2 "Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, ³ '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?"

2. Some of the old-timers remembered Solomon's temple. This rebuilt temple could not compare to the glory of Solomon's temple.

Haggai 2:4 ...be strong, O Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD. 'Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the LORD, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the LORD Almighty. ⁵ 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.'

*Haggai 2:6 "... the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. ⁷ I will shake all nations, and **the desired of all nations will come**, and **I will fill this house with glory**,' says the LORD Almighty.*

3. Here is one of those Messianic prophecies that is easy to miss!

a. In v. 7, Haggai says, "...the desired of all nations will come..." To what or whom is Haggai referring? _____

b. You might say, "A lot of people don't desire God." True, in the sense of which they are aware. But God placed a desire for Him deep in the heart of everyone. Human beings have "exchanged" that glory, and "suppressed that glory" as Romans 1 says.

c. "I will fill THIS house with glory." Is the "this" the rebuilt temple, or is the "this" the "desired of all nations to come?" _____

*Haggai 2:8 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty. ⁹ 'The glory of **this present house** will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty.'*

4. To what or whom is Haggai referring when he says, "this present house?" Does he mean the re-built temple, or does he mean a human temple, "the desired of all nations?"

b. Second, Haggai says that "in this place I will grant peace." What is the "place" mean?

Matthew 12:6 I tell you that one greater than the temple is here.

Matthew 26:61 ... and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'"

c. Jesus used the image of God's temple to refer to Himself!

d. What does Haggai want the folks to see?