

The Questor

God's Messengers....

.... Haggai

Throughout the period in which the prophets of the Old Testament of the bible were active, God was threatening that if they didn't change their wicked ways, both Israel and Judah would be conquered by a foreign power and taken into exile. But there was also a message, particularly for Judah, that God wouldn't totally abandon them. He would, after 50 years in exile, bring them back to their homeland.

Indeed, Isaiah prophesied that Babylon, where the people of Judah were in exile, would fall to the Medes and Persians and that their king, Cyrus, would arrange for the return of the exiles. And that happened between 540 – 445BC.

The first party to return did so in 538BC. That party was led by a guy called Zerubbabel who was the grandson of king Jehoiachin, the king of Judah when it first fell to the Babylonians. The specific role of that group was to re-establish themselves in Judah and, in particular, to re-build the Temple. Haggai travelled with that group.

Eighty years later, in 458BC, a second party made the journey, led by Ezra who was a religious scribe. Their purpose was to re-establish the Jewish Law in the hearts and minds of the people and re-introduce proper worship in the temple.

Finally, in 445BC, a third party led by Nehemiah went back with the principal objective of re-building the city walls. The activities of Ezra and Nehemiah can be read in the books of their name – and it's real wild west stuff!

The Babylonians had taken the best and most capable people into exile and left the rest to look after the land, the vineyards etc. So when the people returned from exile, it wasn't to a vacuum – it was to a land occupied by those other people who felt ownership of it. So there was resistance.

Also, there were some of Zerubbabel's group who remembered or, at least, had been told

about the glories of Solomon's temple. Those people didn't have the means to replicate it in all its glory and so they became disillusioned and, after laying the foundation stones, they left the project and focussed on building houses for themselves. It seems they still hadn't learned the lesson with regard to their relationship with God. After the years in exile, God had made it possible for them to return to their homeland but they still didn't feel the need to obey him.

That's where Haggai came in. God spoke to him and told him that he wasn't pleased that the people had abandoned the temple project in favour of making nice homes for themselves. So he once again applied sanctions. He withheld the rain and the crops and vines failed and the people didn't have enough to eat and drink.

Haggai spoke to them and made the connection between the failing harvest and God's displeasure. He told them that, if they wanted things to get better, they should get on with re-building the Temple. So Zerubbabel and the high priest fired the people up and they did as God had demanded.

The people were a bit disappointed that their new Temple was a poor effort compared to Solomon's Temple. But God told them not to worry about that because he would be shaking up the world order and, ultimately, his Temple would be grander than the one built by Solomon.

He certainly did shake up the world order. The Medes and Persians were taken over by the Greeks who were taken over by the Romans and it was during the Roman period that Herod built an extremely grand temple complex.

Haggai's final message was to Zerubbabel himself. God wanted him to know that, as a descendent of King David, he was chosen to be like God's signet ring – meaning that from his line would come the Messiah, Jesus.