

My People Have Returned!

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We will be returning to the building to worship on May 10, 2020. It has been eight weeks since we have been together, and we have surely missed assembling. March 8th was our last gathering. We had to postpone our Gospel meeting that was scheduled at the end of April. While others were more bothered by not working, recreating, or eating out; we were most disturbed by not being able to worship as a congregation.

The excitement of our return reminded me of Israel's return from Babylonian captivity. They were away for 70 years while we were not away quite that long, I suspect our feelings are the same. Judah was taken into captivity as a punishment for their sins and idolatry. We chose to stop assembling for the safety of our members. This was not done in response to any government order. We did not want to ruin our reputation in the community or risk the lives of any of our elderly, and therefore chose to shut down for a brief time.

David wrote, *"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD"* (Ps 122:1). I am thinking of this verse in a new light now. What a joy it will be to be together after such a lengthy absence. David also wrote, *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"* (Ps 133:1). Amen to that.

Israel was in captivity until Cyrus, the king of Persia, conquered Babylon and sent them home. Isa 44:28 prophesied of this event: *That saith of **Cyrus**, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.* Isa 45:13 adds to this: *I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and **he shall let***

go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts.

Ezra 1:1-3 reveals the fulfilling of Isaiah's words. *Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and **he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.** Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and **build the house of the LORD God of Israel,** (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.* (Jeremiah is used as a representative of the prophets in the text.)

When Israel returned they began construction on the temple. The building was delayed through government intervention, but finally completed during the time of Haggai. This prophet recorded God's displeasure with Israel while they delayed to build. In Hag 1:2 we read, *"Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built."*

Chapter 1 goes on to show how Israel could not prosper while the Lord's temple was incomplete. God blew away their wealth until they got busy with His commands. Hag 1:14 says, *"And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and **did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God,**"*

When Solomon ruled Israel they were at the height of power. Solomon built a grand temple to honor God. Some of the elderly men had seen this first temple before they were taken into captivity. Now they had returned. They were no longer powerful. They were a conquered people. They no longer had a king, just a governor. The temple that was erected was not as glorious as the one that had been destroyed by the Babylonians. Hag 2:3 asks, *“Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?”*

Solomon built the first temple. Zerubbabel built the second. Herod remodeled the temple in his day. This is the temple that is referenced in John 2. After casting money changers out of the temple, Jesus was asked for a sign showing He had the authority to do such an act. John 2:19-20 records, *“Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, **Forty and six years was this temple in building**, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?”* Jesus was speaking of the resurrection of His body. The physical body is the temple that holds our spirit.

As we restore our worship together, there will be some changes which will cause some to feel it is not as glorious as it once was. We will have smaller numbers if the elderly and ill remain home. We will have masks. We will not shake hands or hug. We will meet for a shorter period and visit sparingly. This may be disappointing to some.

Remember the most glorious time of the temple was not when Solomon built it, but when Jesus entered it. Our worship will return to normal in time, if the Lord wills. But for now, let us not be disappointed. Jesus is with us. That is the true glory. We rejoice that we are God’s people who are able to assemble again after the captivity of the virus. God be praised!