

## **Rekindling the Passion, Remembering the Plan**

After Israel's return to the land following their Babylonian captivity, enthusiasm reigned supreme as plans moved forward to rebuild the temple which had been destroyed 70 years before. The prophet Jeremiah had accurately prophesied of these events (Jer. 25:11-12), but his words went unheeded, and the nation reaped the sad results. Now, decades later, they began their return under the leadership of Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua the high priest. They had made their plans to gather again in the place where God had put His Name. They were ready to rebuild and put their hands to the work. The year was 535 BC and from an outward standpoint, nothing stood in the way of the people of God. Or so it seemed. But after a few short years, the work abruptly ceased when the Persian monarch, King Artaxerxes issued a decree halting all temple construction. The excitement which had fueled Israel's ambitious plans quickly eroded, replaced by an attitude of complacency and spiritual indifference. Amazingly, God's people were more concerned about personal interests and self-comfort than in His concerns (Hag. 1:4). The result was a ten-year hiatus in the work of the Lord.

As I think through these events in Israel's history, the parallels today during this current pandemic are obvious. Having overcome the hurdle of figuring out how to meet again while abiding by recommended governmental guidelines, we have finally turned the ignition on the engine that has been quiet for far too long. Admittedly, things look and sound much differently. The same spiritual furniture which has always been there has been rearranged. It reminds me of my boyhood days when my bedroom was rearranged during spring cleaning. My bed was put against a different wall, the dressers in a different location. They were all the same things, but it and the room had a different feel. That is the way it currently is in many local churches. There is a newness to the landscape and when Zoom is added in, there is unquestionably a sense of excitement in the air. But it is an excitement that can easily wane and dissipate over time if it is not purposefully maintained in the Lord.

### **Rekindling the Passion**

This was the very issue that Haggai addressed in his brief four-month ministry to the Lord's people. An older man, God raised Haggai up to rebuke the returning exiles for their delay in getting back to the work of the Lord after it had stopped. They were convinced that the time had not yet come to rebuild the temple. Spiritual apathy always seems to find a chapter and verse to self-justify. The people thought they had God's timeline down and came up with a convenient and plausible excuse – at least in their minds - to hold back from moving ahead. For many who remain at home and take advantage of video conferencing options for health reasons, all well and good, and perfectly understandable. But for those who lag in coming back because of the comfort and convenience of a home-based worship alternative, the words of Haggai would clearly apply: "Consider your ways!" (Hag. 1:5). Whether it is an issue of fear over faith, or simply a case of spiritual apathy, if the Lord calls out through His Spirit "Consider your ways," it would be advisable to take note!

Calling the people to action, it took a mere three weeks for the people to change direction (Hag. 1:8-12). How we need more prophets like him! The hearts of many of God's people had become dull and they needed a rekindling of their passion. Like the church at Ephesus, we might also need to be reminded in time not to not leave our first love, a rekindling of our passion, especially if we see the excitement begin to settle down. Otherwise, the Lord may send a jolting message from a brother like Haggai to stir us up out of our slumber.

### **Remembering the Plan**

But there is another tact that the Lord takes to help His people move forward by faith. For Israel, it came through the encouraging ministry of the younger man named Zechariah who had a series of eight visions in a single night. They were given to encourage God's people to "keep on keeping on" and to keep the bigger picture in view. He wanted to remind them that their labor would not be in vain in the Lord. How many of us need to hear this also! God is working on a much bigger canvas than we can take in at one glance, and we need to take a step back to see the bigger spiritual picture that we have the privilege to have a part in. The Scriptures help us to do just that as Zechariah's visions did for Israel. Through the diligent and consistent study of NT truth and the accurate ministry of the Word, whether it be through young or old, it will accomplish the same effect in our lives as well.

Regathered in place, rekindling the passion, remembering the plan - a sure fire approach to keep the focus clear and the love strong as we live in the light of His imminent return, looking for that blessed hope as we see the Day approaching.

Mark Kolchin