



Intentions vs. Obedience

Decree of Cyrus 538 BC

Ezra 1:1-5

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia [almost seventy years after the first Jewish captives were taken to Babylon], that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might begin to be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and put it also in writing:

Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem in Judah.

Whoever is among you of all His people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel, in Jerusalem; He is God.

And in any place where a survivor [of the Babylonian captivity of the Jews] sojourns, let the men of that place assist him with silver and gold, with goods and beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God in Jerusalem.

Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites, with all those whose spirits God had stirred up, to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord in Jerusalem.

Pronouncement of Haggai 520 BC

Haggai 1:2-8; and reference Ezra 3:10-11

Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say, The time is not yet come that the [a]Lord's house should be rebuilt [although Cyrus had ordered it done eighteen years before].

Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying,

Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house [of the Lord] lies in ruins?

Now therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways and set your mind on what has come to you.

You have sown much, but you have reaped little; you eat, but you do not have enough; you drink, but you do not have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages has earned them to put them in a bag with holes in it.

Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways (your previous and present conduct) and how you have fared.

Go up to the hill country and bring lumber and rebuild [My] house, and I will take pleasure in it and I will be glorified, says the Lord [by accepting it as done for My glory and by displaying My glory in it].

Study Questions for Ezra 1:1-5

1. Is there anything God has stirred up in your heart?
 - a. Have you responded to this stirring in some way?
 - b. Do you hold back from responding?
2. After the decree of Cyrus, why do you think many Jews remained in Babylon?
 - a. Have you ever held back from God's Call?
(Consider the challenges of fear, discouragement, and doubt)
 - b. Have you ever entered a situation without knowing the outcome, but trusting God?

Study Questions for Haggai 1:2-8

1. Why did the people say, "the time is not yet come that the Lord's House should be rebuilt?"
 - a. Do you think some of them wanted to return to Babylon?
(Consider: The desolate land, the hard work, hostile enemies resisting their efforts)
2. Why did they reap so little?
3. Why did they suffer crop failures and drought?
4. Are there areas of your life that you need to put God first?
5. Is it difficult to trust God?

Application

1. Do you believe God's Will can be accomplished through a non-Christian?
2. Are there places today where "God's Temple" is in disrepair due to neglect?
 - a. God's Temple can be your heart, your Church community, the larger Church in the world.
3. Are there times you have intended to honor God's Will but work, family, life, etc. got in the way?
4. What does it mean for you to be obedient to God's Will?

Note: Cyrus, a heathen ruler of a heathen empire (Persia), was "twice named [before his birth] in the book of Isaiah as anointed of God and predestined to conquer kings and fortified places and to set the Jews free from captivity (Isa. 44:28; 45:1-14). Daniel... records that during the night that followed a great feast, Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans, was slain, and Darius the Mede received the kingdom (Dan. 5:30, 31). Darius was the predecessor of Cyrus, or his regent, in Babylonia (Dan. 6:28)." God gave Cyrus the resolution and the desire to execute His intention. That the Lord at this time chose a heathen as His instrument was in accordance with the new position that the empires of the world were henceforth to assume toward the kingdom of God.

