

Exploring Ezra

4. Ezra 5.1-15: The Prophets Intervene I *Haggai 1-2*

To Start With

In pairs get people to summarise in **12 words or less** a well know or classic story (book or film) in under two minutes.
(eg. Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, Pride & Prejudice, Romeo & Juliet, Star Wars)
You could make it a competition and reward the best/most entertaining efforts!

Engaging the Text

Briefly recap the story of Ezra so far (if necessary glance over the previous 4 chapters)

Read Ezra 5.1-5

This is a very brief account of certain events. An alternative account is found in Haggai. Today's study will focus on that version of these events.

Read Haggai 1.1-11

1. How would you summarise the section of the story contained in these verses? (You can use more than 12 words this time!)
2. What reasons did the Israelites have for not having rebuilt the temple? How far do these seem like reasonable excuses? What does God's perspective appear to be?
3. How far do you think we tend to use 'reasonable' excuses to procrastinate/excuse ourselves for not obeying God? What sort of things do you think **we** tend to use?

Now read Haggai 1.12-15

4. What strikes you about:
 - a) God's intervention?
 - b) The response of the leaders and people?

*A month later God spoke to the people again.
Read Haggai 2.1-9*

5. a) What do verses 1-5 suggest about how the work to rebuild the temple is progressing? What sorts of conversations do you suspect people are having?

(v4: It seems that people were discouraged because they simply didn't have the resources to re build the temple to its former glory - perhaps they feared that if it wasn't magnificent God would not dwell in it!)

- b) Make a list of the ways in which God encourages them. What do you think he is trying to inspire in them and why?

Finally, Read Ezra 6.8-10

6. What does this decree issued by King Darius tell us about God's promises/ways of bringing about his will?
7. When have you felt like God asked you to do something you didn't have the resources for? Can anyone give an example of a time when they've felt like this and God has shown his faithfulness to them?
8. Are there things that people feel God is asking of them at the moment that they are struggling to obey/do? If people feel able invite them to share and pray about those things, for wisdom, courage and faith. (Smaller groups might be better for this).

Alternatively if those things are too personal you could spend time in quiet, asking people to write them down as prayers and put them in sealed envelopes with their names on. The cell leaders could then confidentially hold those envelopes and return them in a month to see how God has responded.

