CHAPTER 19
The Return Home
EZRA 1-6 and HAGGAI 1-2

THE STORY

Introduction
God’s grand vision is to be with his people. God’s people have been in exile 70 years in accordance with the prophecy given to Jeremiah.

"This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. "But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the Lord, “and will make it desolate forever.”
Jeremiah 25:11-1

One day, Daniel is having his quiet time in Jeremiah.
"In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes."
Daniel 9:1-3
The time has come to return home and rebuild the temple.

Question: What does God do when we make his big thing our small thing?

I. God turns the heart of Cyrus, the Persian King, toward the Jews. Cyrus releases the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.
EZRA 1:1-7
God revealed what he would do to Isaiah the prophet over 150 years before it happened.

Jerusalem to Be Inhabited
24 "This is what the Lord says—your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the Lord, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, 25 who foils the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners, who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense, 26 who carries out the words of his servants and fulfills the predictions of his messengers, 27 who says of Jerusalem, "It shall be inhabited," of the towns of Judah, "They shall be built," and of their ruins, "I will restore them," 28 who says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."'' Isaiah 44:24-28

50,000 Jews responded to the call to return.

Why is building the temple such a big deal to God?
- The temple is a picture of God’s passion to live among his people.
- There is a problem. Sin separates his people and the world from him.
- God required a blood sacrifice so we could gain access to his presence.
- God was preparing the world for the coming of his Son to be our Savior.

The people begin well.
They build an altar and lay the foundation of the temple.
Then opposition arises.
The work stops and God’s big thing becomes their small thing.
Their priorities are misplaced and life isn’t going so well.
God is not at the center of life.
So what does God do?

II. God moved the heart of his people to return and rebuild the temple.
Ezra 3:1-3
III. God sends seasons of trials and sufferings to get their attention. HAGGAI 1:1-11

THE STORY

God raises up a prophet, Haggai, to call the people back to their primary task – to build God's temple. Give careful thought to your ways. God's people had forgotten their initial passion – their first love. The people listened and obeyed.

THE STORY

"Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD." Haggai 1:12

Is God trying to get our attention as a nation?

THE STORY

Conclusion

God is either the main thing or he is nothing. Jesus calls us to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.” Matthew 6:33

C.S. Lewis wrote, “If we put first things first, we get second things thrown in; but if we put second things first, we lose both the first and the second things.”

Is God the main thing in our life?