**Disillusioned**

Haggai 1-2, Ezra 3-7

**Small Group Guide**

**Opening Icebreaker Question**:

* Can you recall a time when you put a great deal of effort, money, time, or energy into planning something that didn’t pan out as you hoped? A vacation, family event, business project, ministry effort, etc.?
* How would you define the word “disillusioned?”

**Optional Historical Background:**

 Last week we looked at the period known as the Exile, when Northern Israel had been destroyed and most of Judah’s population had been carried 1100 miles away to Babylon. God had been working through his people to carry out his age-old promise to rescue humanity and restore the earth from the mess that sin has made, and now they hardly even exist as a people anymore. There was certainly great disillusionment in that historical moment, when it seemed that God had forgotten his promises, or that the people had messed up one too many times for God to keep those promises. But God had spoken through prophets like Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, and Daniel, to remind his people that he was still working, he was still going to carry out those promises, and that one day he would even bring them back to their homeland.

 The fulfillment of that promise started in 539 BC, when God raised up a new world power, Media-Persia, led by **Cyrus** of Persia, to overthrow Babylon. Cyrus would very soon issue a decree allowing any Jewish people who wanted to go back to their homeland. He would even send them with resources to start rebuilding. A relatively small percentage of people chose to return; after all, 70 years had passed, and most of the people could only remember life in Babylon. But some of the exiles returned. Jerusalem had been a heap of rubble for decades, and soon after they arrive, they set out to rebuild the Temple, starting with the foundation. After all, the central part of their identity as a people was that God had chosen to dwell among them, and given them a place (the Temple) to worship him and experience his presence.

 We’re going to look at two different books from this period in Judah’s history today. One is the book of Ezra. Ezra is writing years later, and describes this period in narrative fashion, covering many decades. But Haggai was a prophet who was there speaking for God in the midst of this season, and his book covers a very specific moment in that larger time span. We’ll begin in **Ezra Ch. 3**. Ezra describes the scene when those first exiles came back and laid the foundation for the Temple.

**Read** Ezra 3:10-13.

1. What two different reactions do you notice and who expresses them?
2. Why do you think these reactions were different?
3. The people become disillusioned in this moment. How do you tend to deal with a sense of disillusionment, or disappointment, regardless of what has prompted it?

In the face of difficulty and disillusionment the temple site went untouched for 16 years. Meanwhile the Jews went about settling into life in the homeland. They built houses and raised families. That’s where the prophet Haggai steps in with a message from God.

**Read HAGGAI 1:3-11**.

1. This is a “prophetic complaint” from God.  What is His main point?
2. Pastor Josh points out that there is a foundational issue at hand, and it is not that God is homeless:  “The heart of the matter is that the people’s disillusionment has left them in a crisis of identity. They don’t know who they are anymore.”
	1. In light of Israel and Judah’s history—in the context of the “Big Story”—why was the lack of a Temple reflective of a crisis of identity? How was the Temple linked to who they were as a people? (Hint: animal sacrifice and God’s presence among his people are keys).
	2. How might disillusionment and a crisis of identity cause you to put other priorities or identifying factors before God? (E.g., “paneled houses”)
	3. Josh said that disillusionment is an opportunity to re-discover who we are. How might we find or develop our primary identity as God’s people? What helps this process?

**The Jews respond and work on God’s temple.  Read HAGGAI 2:1-9.**

1. How is the tone of this passage different than the preceding one?
2. What encouragements might the people receive from God’s message in vv. 4-5? (Hint: note the allusions to God’s deliverance of his people from Egypt, as recorded in Exodus).
3. What do you learn about the nature of God and his relationship to his people in this passage?
4. How might you be personally encouraged from this awareness?
5. What does God mean when he says that he will “shake the heavens and the earth,” and “shake all nations?” (Vv. 6-7)
	1. For a short-term example, see Ezra 6:1-12 to see how God moves the heart of a king to provide for his people, in response to the Samaritans’ request that the Jews’ re-building be halted.
	2. Is there some longer-term, “eschatological” implication to these verses? Hint: how might the 2nd Temple be filled with more glory than the first?

**Read HAGGAI 2:20-24**

1. Why might Zerubbabel especially need encouragement?
2. What is the significance of a signet ring?
	1. How is Zerubbabel symbolically the “signet ring” of God in this scenario, relative to God’s great promises to King David in 2 Samuel 7? (He was a descendant of David, who had arrived in a position of leadership against all odds, long after it seemed that King David’s line had terminated).
	2. Why is the presence of Zerubbabel’s name significant in Matt. 1:12-13 and Luke 3:27? Leaders: Zerubbabel was a crucial link between God’s promises to Abraham and David to their fulfillment in Jesus.
3. Note any messianic language in Haggai 2:20-24 (words that God had said about the coming Rescuer).
	1. How is Zerubbabel a “type,” or forerunner, of Jesus?
	2. How do you feel knowing that God has had a consistent plan of redemption (which we call “The Big Story”) throughout history and through the Bible?  Discuss.
	3. Josh said that we deal with disillusionment by seeing our lives in connection to this Big Story of Jesus (as Zerubbabel was connected to God’s Big Story of redemption). How can we be more connected to the Big Story of redemption on a daily basis? What would that look like with our kids, our co-workers, our neighbors, and our small groups?
	4. What might be impeding you from connecting to Jesus’ power of redemption on a daily basis?
		1. Have you lost hope like the Exilic Jews?  How can we help and pray for you?
		2. Have you just placed yourself before God and are working more on your “paneled house” than God’s kingdom? How can we hold you accountable?
4. **Share and Pray:**  Among our prayer requests, let’s pray that God will drill his hope of redemption and transformation deep into our Spirits.