

Haggai

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Haggai addresses three problems common to all people of all times, and gives three inspired solutions to those problems. The first problem is disinterest (1:1-15). The people had returned from exile for the stated purpose of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2-4) and had made a start on their assigned task; but opposition had appeared and the work had stopped. The people had become more concerned with building beautiful houses for themselves, perhaps in an attempt to blot out the memory of their exile in a strange land (1:4). To wake them from their apathetic attitude, God speaks twice to the people. They first need to realize that they are fruitless (1:5, 6) because they have turned from God's house to their own houses (1:7-9). All their efforts at building their own kingdom can never produce lasting results. After seeing their problem, the people then need to understand that God will accept what they do, that He will be glorified if they will only yield to Him what they have (1:8).

The second problem is discouragement (2:1-9). Some of the older people in the band of returned exiles had seen Solomon's temple when they were children, so that no building, however beautiful, could compare with the glory of that former temple (2:3). The discouragement of the older people had quickly influenced the younger ones until, less than a month after the rebuilding began, work on the temple had ceased. But again Haggai brings a message designed to deal decisively with discouragement. The solution has two parts—one to deal with the immediate problem, the other to bring a long-range resolution. For the present it is enough for the people to "be strong ... be strong ... be strong ... and work" (2:4). The other key to overcoming discouragement is for the builders to know that they are building for the day when God will so fill this house with glory that it will surpass the glory of Solomon's temple (2:9).

The final issue that Haggai has to face is the problem of dissatisfaction (2:10-23). Now that the people are working, they expect an immediate reversal of all their years of inactivity. So the prophet comes with a question for the priests (2:12, 13) about clean and unclean things and their influence on one another. The response of the priests is that uncleanness is infectious while holiness is not. The application is obvious: Do not expect the work of three months to undo the neglect of sixteen years. The Lord's next word to the people is a surprise: "But from this day I will bless you" (2:19). The people needed to understand that God's blessings cannot be earned, but come as gracious gifts from a giving God. God has chosen Zerubbabel to be a sign (2:23), that is, to represent the servant nature to be fulfilled ultimately in Zerubbabel's greatest Son, Jesus. Note Zerubbabel's name in both the genealogical lists in the Gospels (Matt. 1; Luke 3), indicating that God's final, highest blessing is a Person, His Son Jesus Christ.

(Spirit Filled Life Bible Introduction to Haggai, Sam Middlebrook)

Haggai 1:1-11

Zerubbabel is the Sheshbazzar of Ezra 1:8. He was of the royal line, and appointed governor by Cyrus. Josedech was son of Seraiah, high priest when Jerusalem was taken, 2 Kings 25:18-21. The returned exiles had been experiencing a succession of bad seasons. They had sown much, and reaped little; their money ran out of the bag as quickly as they put it in; a drought lay on all the land, and the reason for it was to be found in the neglected temple. How frequently our disasters and losses in business arise from our failure to remember God's cause. We say that we have not the time, cannot afford the money, and see no necessity for setting apart the Lord's Day or the daily period for meditation and prayer. Did we see things as they really are, we should find that this is false economy, and wastes more than we save. "There is that which withholdeth more than is meet (suitable), but it tendeth to poverty." The mower does not waste time when he stops to whet his scythe.

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

The prophet Haggai rebukes those that returned to Jerusalem for neglecting the temple work. **Did Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest take offence to this admonition and instruction.**

Hag. 1:12

How do the lessons from these verses compare with the New Testament verses of 1 Cor. 6:19-20?

Acts 5:2

Haggai 1:12-15

The Jews were moved by the word of the Lord to "fear before the Lord," and to "obey the voice of the Lord their God" (v. 12). To realize personally and experimentally that God is *our* God, is sure to prompt us to reverent obedience.

The blessed result of obedience immediately followed. At once the Lord passed from upbraidings to gracious assurances. As soon as the people had shown the sincere *purpose* of doing the Lord's will, even before they had actually begun the work, the Lord instantly said by His inspired "messenger," "I am with you, saith Jehovah." God's presence with us is the sure pledge of success in all our undertakings for His glory. And the moment that, with hearty submission and willing obedience, we have respect to all His will, He blots out all our past sins of unfaithfulness for His dear Son's sake, and tenderly welcomes us to His abiding presence.

When God has a great work to do He finds the right men, and endues them with the right spirit for the due execution of the work. However sluggish and inactive men's "spirit" (v. 14) may be naturally in regard to the things of God, when God wills it, He can revive His work in the Church, and "stir up" its members to holy energy and devoted perseverance in all that is good. Then, like the Jews, each and all come forward, volunteering to "work in the house of the Lord," whom they now know as "their God" (v. 14). Let those of us who have fallen into spiritual torpor (lethargy), but who are now awakened, endeavor to make up, so far as is possible, for past time that we have lost, by redoubled diligence for whatever time there may still be left to us. The longer we have loitered, the more let us henceforth redeem the time in self-devoting labors for the Lord.

(Bible Commentary, Jamieson, Fausset & Brown)

How did the Lord encourage Zerubbabel, Joshua and the people?

Hag. 1:13-14

How does the lesson in these verses compare with Isaiah 51:7-9?

2 Cor. 6:1-2

Haggai 2:1-23

Men are too apt to judge of the value of things by the outward appearance, which is called by our Lord a *judging after the flesh* (John 8:15). In outward splendor the second temple was inferior, especially in its first beginnings, to the temple of Solomon. But in the truest glory it was far superior to the former temple. For in it Messiah walked, worshipped, and glorified the Father. Jesus, who visited the temple of Zerubbabel, was the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of His person (Heb. 1:3). Though the second temple had not what were in the Jews' eyes the glory of the first temple, the shekinah-cloud, the ark, the sacred fire, the urim and the thummim, and the spirit of prophecy, it was honored with the presence in it of the grand Antitype (foreshadowed in a type; type being an O. T. person or thing believed to foreshadow another in the N. T.) to all these, "God manifest in the flesh."

“ ‘The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former’, says the Lord of hosts. ‘And in this place I will give peace’, says the Lord of hosts.” (Hag. 2:9) This prophecy alone confutes the Jews. For if Messiah has never yet come, as they say, wherein can it be shown that “the glory of the latter temple shall be greater than of the former”. In all other respects it was inferior to its predecessor, save in that one which outweighed infinitely all the rest, the presence of the incarnate God. Moreover, the times of the second temple were pre-eminently times of trouble, first under the Persian kings, then under Antiochus Epiphanes, and finally under the Romans, who at last utterly destroyed the temple. In what sense then can the prophecy be understood, “In this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts” (v. 9). To the unbelieving Jews the difficulty is incapable of solution. To the true Christian it is a truth full of unspeakable, experimental comfort, that Christ is “our peace” (Eph. 2:14).

Yea, more; as it was in the “place” where Haggai spake that Christ first gave “peace through the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20) to all believers, so it shall be “in this” same “place” that He, from His throne in Jerusalem, shall hereafter, in manifested glory, “give peace,” first to His long-separated and outcast people, and then to all nations. As the second temple began with humble and despised beginnings, but finally had pre-eminent glory attached to it, so Jesus, who came among us at first in great lowliness, shall at last come in all His glorious majesty. The “shaking” of all earthly Kingdoms, as moveable and transitory (Heb. 12:26-28), is the necessary preliminary before setting up “the kingdom that cannot be moved” (vv. 6, 7). It is true “the desire of all nations” has already come (v. 7), and has given peace with God and with their own consciences to all who believe. These indeed know Him as the only portion they desire, the “altogether lovely.” But all nations, and even His own elect nation, do not as yet call Him blessed. The agitations of wars in the political world, accompanied with corresponding commotions and convulsions in the natural world, are, therefore, permitted and ordained by God as about to continue unto, and to multiply especially towards the end, in order that “the distress of nations with perplexity” (Luke 21:25-27), may create a longing desire throughout the world for the advent of the Prince of Peace, the Great Healer of the woes of humanity.

It is to many a stumblingblock that true Christians often possess now but little of the outward world-glitter of “the silver and the gold” (v. 8). But let believers remember, God could give these if He pleased; for they are wholly His. But it is His will, that in this dispensation His people should walk by faith, and not as yet by sight. In due time the outward glories of the Christian temple shall be revealed with transcendent splendor in the city of our God (Rev. 21:10-26).

Meanwhile let us not be discouraged by the comparatively humble aspect of true Christianity on earth now (v. 3). “The Lord of hosts” says to every fearful believer, “Be strong and work, for I am with you”—unseen, it is true, but realized in quickening, enlightening, comforting, sanctifying, and strengthening power by all my people (v. 4). Whatever be our difficulties and discouragements, if the work that we have in hand be the Lord’s work, and if the Lord be with us, we have a power on our side which nothing can withstand. God’s “covenant” engages to His people that His “Spirit” will “remain with” them to the end. Therefore they have nothing to “fear” and everything to hope (v. 5).

Attendance to outward ordinances reaches but a short way; it cannot sanctify so as to render those persons acceptable to God who lack the internal principle of faith and obedience (vv. 12-14). No, those who are unclean before God because of “dead works,” thereby render unclean all their services.

From the moment that we unreservedly yield ourselves up unto God we may confidently calculate on His blessing (vv. 15-19). The path of duty is the path of safety, comfort, and peace in the end. Though we do not see the immediate good fruits of faith and obedience, we can well afford to wait in confident anticipation of them. God’s promises are all sure: they are infinitely to be preferred, even in prospect, to the world’s best things in possession.

Believers need not fear though great revolutions and upheavals of kingdoms, and even convulsions in the physical world, are impending (vv. 21, 22). For the Lord of hosts has from everlasting to everlasting “chosen” His people in Christ, the Antitype to Zerubbabel (v. 23). He is the “signet” in the Father’s hand ; and they are sealed in Him as safe for ever. They are sealed with His Holy Spirit as the children of God, and heirs of that kingdom before which ere long all earthly kingdoms shall fall. Let us, as believers, rejoice to know, that “all the promises of God in him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God” (2 Cor. 1:20).

(Bible Commentary, Jamieson, Fausset & Brown)

What message did Haggai declare unto Zerubbabel, Joshua and the people on the twenty-first day of the month?

What message did Haggai declare unto Zerubbabel on the twenty-fourth day of the month?

Why is Zerubbabel singled out in Haggai’s prophetic sayings stated in Haggai 2:22-23 and why is Zerubbabel made “like a signet” (Hag. 2:23)? (Hint: Christ was from the lineage of Zerubbabel)

Why was the “latter temple” (Hag. 2:9) more glorious than the one built by Solomon?