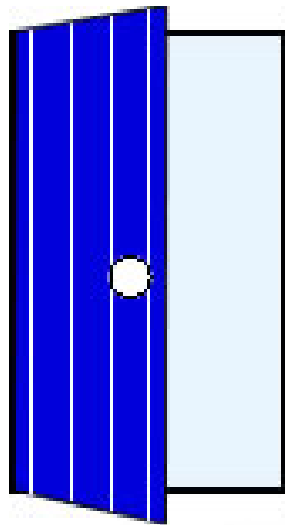


BIBLE STUDIES



Mill Lane Chapel

Haggai

(3) "I am with you, saith the Lord"

Read Chapter 1: 12-15

As we have seen, the book of Haggai comprises four messages: **(1)** To reprove their idleness, 1: 1-15 **(2)** To restore their confidence, 2: 1-9; **(3)** To rebuke their unholiness, 2: 10-19; **(4)** To reward their leader, 2: 20-23.

1) TO REPROVE THEIR IDLENESS, 1: 1-15

The first message can be divided into two sections: **(A)** The reproof, V1-11 and **(B)** The result, V12-15.

A) THE REPROOF, V1-11

We have already studied Haggai's searching message: "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?", V4. God's people had put their own interests before His interests, and this reminded us that, centuries later, Paul was obliged to say, "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's", Philippians 2: 21. Bearing in mind that the "Lord's house" today is the local assembly (see 1 Timothy 3: 15), we should seriously assess our own priorities. Is **His** house 'lying waste' today because **we** are 'doing our own thing'? We are happy to report, however, that Haggai's preaching was heeded, and this brings us to

B) THE RESULT, V12-15

The little word "then" occurs twice in this section. See V12 & V13. In the first case, it introduces what **they** did: "**Then** Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God." They recognised how wrong they had been to neglect God's interests in favour of their own. In the second case, it introduces what **God** did: "**Then** spake Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord."

We can analyse these verses as follows: **(i)** Their attitude, V12. They "obeyed the voice of the Lord their God.....the people did fear before the Lord." **(ii)** Their assurance, V13. "I am with you, saith the Lord." **(iii)** Their activity, V14-15. "They came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God."

i) Their attitude, V12

"Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord." We must notice:

a) Their unity

The leadership was united. Zerubbabel and Joshua acted together. The people were united. "**All** the remnant of the people" were involved. The leadership and the people were united. "Zerubbabel.....and Joshua.....**with** all the remnant of the people." The leaders and the people acted as one. This delightful unity of purpose contrasts with previous self-interest: "ye run **every man** to **his own house**", V9. Other references show that unity characterised God's people this time. See 1: 14, 2: 2, 2: 4. They had one common aim and purpose.

This reminds us of Psalm 133: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.....for **there** the Lord commanded the blessing." It also reminds us of Philippians 1: 27, "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit with one mind striving together (not, 'striving with each other') for the faith of the gospel." There is nothing worse than a bunch of irreconcilable people trying to preach a message of reconciliation! In this connection, we should also notice the occurrence of "one accord" in Acts. "These all continued with **one accord** in prayer and supplication", 1: 14. "They were all with **one accord** in one place", 2: 1. They continued "daily with **one accord** in the temple", 2: 46 "They lifted up their voice to God with **one accord**", 4: 24. "They were all with **one accord** in Solomon's porch", 5: 12. "It seemed good unto us, being assembled with **one accord**", 15: 25.

Assembly unity is promoted and maintained by activity. Fellowship inevitably suffers when God's people are idle. The old proverb is so true: 'the Devil finds work for idle hands to do.' He also finds work for idle minds to do! People who are busy in the Lord's work just haven't got time to fall out with each other! Working together, with common desires and objectives, is a great preservative from disharmony. We have a wonderful example in the book of Nehemiah where "the people had a mind to work", 4: 6. Just look at them 'labouring together' in Chapter 3! You never saw such a mixed bunch! But their diversity did not hinder their unity. The construction of the tabernacle provides another excellent example. See Exodus 35. The men (V23-24), the woman (V25-26), and the rulers (V26-27) were all involved.

We must therefore "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace", Ephesians 4: 3. It is often pointed out that the Holy Spirit creates that unity by indwelling each believer in the Lord Jesus. We do not **make** the unity. But we must **keep** it! With this in mind, we must "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works", Hebrews 10: 24. Alas, there are other ways in which we can provoke each other! "Let us therefore follow after the things that make for peace, and the things wherewith one may edify another", Romans 14: 19. See also 1 Thessalonians 5: 13. If you do needlessly upset or offend a fellow-believer, do

not hesitate to apologise. A genuine apology is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of spiritual strength.

b) Their obedience

They displayed their obedience in their **relationship** with God ("obeyed the voice of the Lord their God"), and in their **recognition** of Haggai ("and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him"). This contrasts vividly with Zephaniah's description of God's people: "She **obeyed not** the voice; she received **not** correction; she trusted **not** in the Lord; she drew **not** near to her God", 3: 2. We can go a little further in the contrast. Zephaniah describes the "**princes**" as "roaring lions", the "**prophets**" as "light and treacherous persons", and the "**priests**" as guilty of pollution and violence, 3: 3-4. But what a difference here! Zerubbabel was a prince, Haggai was a prophet, Joshua was a priest, and all three were honourable servants of God.

Their relationship with God. They "obeyed the voice of the Lord their God." We all began our Christian lives by obeying the gospel. See Romans 6: 17, "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have **obeyed** from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." Romans begins and ends with reference to "the **obedience** of faith", 1: 5, 16: 26. Compare Acts 6: 7, "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were **obedient** to the faith." But if we commenced our Christian life by "the obedience of faith", then we are to continue our Christian life on the same principle. "As **obedient** children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance", 1 Peter 1: 14. It would be very nice indeed if it could be said of us, "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have **always obeyed**", Philippians 2: 12. We must never forget the words of Samuel to Saul: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in **obeying** the voice of the Lord? Behold, to **obey** is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams", 1 Samuel 15: 22. This does not mean that obedience is easy, especially if the emotions are involved.

Their recognition of Haggai. They "obeyed.....the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him." They recognised that he was "the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message." Haggai was **not** one of the prophets described in Jeremiah 23: 21, "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken unto them, yet they prophesied." We must remember that it is not a man's identity that is important, but a man's ministry. "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man", 1 Corinthians 3: 5. Compare Amos, "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel", Amos 7: 14-15. We must value and esteem servants of God, not because of their education or professional status, or even because of their interesting and engaging personalities, but because they **bring the word of**

God. Even then, they are simply servants exercising their God-given ministry: "as **the Lord** gave to every man."

We cannot fail to notice a significant change of language. When the people were occupied with their own houses and their own interests, God describes them as "this people." He does not acknowledge them. But now, with their change of attitude, and the resumption of work, He is "the Lord their God." See V12 (twice) and V14.

c) Their fear

"The people did fear before the Lord." In his comment on Psalm 19: 9 ("The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever"), C.I.Scofield writes, 'The "fear of the Lord", is a phrase of the Old Testament.....meaning reverential trust, with hatred of evil.' Perhaps we could define it as a 'reverential awe.' It is not cringing fear, but a hatred of anything in our lives that will bring the Lord grief or displeasure. The late Montague Goodman (a lawyer) likened it to 'the attitude of a devoted son to his much loved and honoured father, lest anything should mar the perfect harmony that subsisted between them.' It is not surprising that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1: 7), and "the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9: 10). The early churches "had.....rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in **the fear of the Lord**, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied", Acts 9: 31.

ii) Their assurance, V13

"Then spake Haggai, the Lord's messenger, in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you saith the Lord." After the solemn message in V3-11, it must have given Haggai great joy to comfort and encourage God's people! Their change of attitude enabled God to bless them with His presence. Up to this point, He had acted **against** them (see V9-11), not because He hated them, but to secure a change in their attitude. Now he was going to make it clear that He was **for** them. See Hebrews 12: 11, "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Notice, therefore, that God spoke to His people (V13), and God "stirred up" His people (V14). We must notice:

a) The messenger. Haggai was **entrusted** with the message. He was "the Lord's messenger." On the one hand, he was simply a "messenger": but on the other hand, he was a privileged and responsible servant of God.

It is so important to remember that however elevated our service might appear, we should regard ourselves as "unprofitable servants", Luke 17: 10. Here is the full quotation: "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which

was our duty to do." As 'the Lord's messengers', we must "walk humbly" with God, Micah 6: 8. John the Baptist described himself simply as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness." Now read Romans 12: 3.

It is equally important to remember that it is a great privilege to be "the Lord's messenger." We are "the servants of the most high God", Acts 16: 17. We represent Him. But that carries great responsibility. We must represent Him faithfully. "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful", 1 Corinthians 4: 2. The message we carry is not ours to alter or amend. A messenger must convey the message committed to him without subtraction or addition. Jeremiah was told, "Diminish not a word", 26: 2. Haggai faithfully conveyed the message entrusted to him, whether it involved reproof or encouragement. We must notice as well that Haggai was "the Lord's messenger, in the Lord's message **unto the people.**" He had a responsibility towards them as well. Compare Romans 1: 14, "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise." The word "debtor" means exactly what it says: Paul was in debt to the Greeks and the Barbarians. He did not owe them a sum of money, but he owed them the Gospel! **We** owe it to men and women to let them hear the Gospel. How well are we discharging our debt?

But Haggai was also **involved** in the message. He was not 'the Lord's messenger, **with** the Lord's message unto the people, but "the Lord's messenger, **in** the Lord's message unto the people." He was certainly not 'the Lord's messenger, with his **own** message!' The man and his message were one. The prophets were not men who mechanically churned out sermons. They felt the weight of the word of God themselves. That is why their messages are often called a "burden." See, for example, Isaiah 13: 1. "The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see." How much do **we** feel the weight of God's word. Or, to put it another way, is the word of God part of us? Listen to Jeremiah: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart", 15: 16. Ezekiel was told, "Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel", 3: 1-4. Compare Revelation 10: 8-11. Paul "was pressed in the spirit" at Corinth, Acts 18: 5. The RV has 'constrained by the word' here, and W.E.Vine explains this as follows: 'Paul felt the urge of the word of his testimony to the Jews at Corinth.'

b) The message. "I am with you, saith the Lord." This is a great promise! Other passages come readily to mind. For example, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for **he** hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee", Hebrews 13: 5. (This reiterates the promise made in Deuteronomy 31: 6-8 and Joshua 1: 5). Matthew's Gospel commences with His presence: "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel; which being interpreted is, **God with us**", 1: 23. It concludes with His presence: "Go ye therefore, and teach (disciple) all nations.....teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, **I am with you** always, even unto the end of the world.

Amen", 28: 19-20. This is very precious, but we must remember that, through Haggai, God promised His presence to people who had realised the folly of living for themselves, and given Him first place in their lives. If **we** want to experience the presence of God consciously and actively in our own lives, we must also give Him first place. Haggai emphasised the greatness of God. "I am with you, saith **the Lord (Jehovah)**." Promises are only as good as those who make them, and the French Bible says it all, 'Je suis avec vous, dit **l'Eternel!**' They needed nothing else. The presence of God met every need. All their resources were in Him. This must have been a tremendous encouragement to them, especially when we remember that they are described as "all the **remnant** of the people." On the one hand, we have their weakness, with possible depression and discouragement, and on the other hand we have the presence of God! The evidence of God's presence with them follows:

iii) Their activity, V14-15

"And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, in the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king." There are at least four things to notice here:

a) The initiative. It began with **God**. "And **the Lord** stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel..... Joshua.....all the remnant of the people." The recommencement of the work was not 'their idea.' They responded to divinely-given conviction. In fact, the whole story of their return from captivity, and work of temple reconstruction, began with God. "Now, in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the **Lord** stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia.....", 2 Chronicles 36: 22, Ezra 1: 2. We should be careful about making passionate appeals in connection with missionary work, and other aspects of service for God. The Lord Jesus said, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the **Lord of the harvest**, that **he** will send forth labourers into his harvest", Matthew 9: 37-38. Barnabas and Saul were "sent forth by the **Holy Ghost**", Acts 13: 4. God took the initiative in connection with the work at Jerusalem.

We must not forget, however, that we must respond to God's initiative. See 2 Timothy 1: 6, "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that **thou** stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands." See also 2 Peter 3: 1.

The **leaders** are mentioned next. "And the Lord stirred up the spirit of **Zerubbabel**.....and **Joshua**." See Ezra 5: 1-2. Having spoken through Haggai and Zechariah, Zerubbabel and Joshua "rose up.....and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem." They were "ensamples to the flock", 1 Peter 5: 3. Timothy was to be "example of the believers (objective genitive here; 'be thou an

ensample to them that believe', RV), in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in purity." We must remember that an assembly seldom, if ever, rises above the example and standards of its leaders.

Finally, the **people** are mentioned. "And the Lord stirred up.....the spirit of all the remnant of **the people**." Whilst, as we have said, the leadership set the people an excellent example, we must not forget that God "stirred up.....the spirit of all the remnant of the people" in exactly the same way as he "stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel.....and Joshua." Both leaders and people acted out of divine conviction. It was not just a case of 'follow my leader!' Conviction about the work got right down to the 'grass roots' of the nation. Don't leave everything to the leadership in the assembly, and trade on their convictions. God wants us **all** to be concerned about His work.

b) The enthusiasm. Now let's alter the emphasis. "And the Lord stirred up the **spirit** of Zerubbabel.....and the **spirit** of Joshua.....and the **spirit** of all the remnant of the people." Whilst we could argue that "the spirit" refers to the highest part of man, it seems more likely that this refers to their inward desires and aspirations. Perhaps we can illustrate this from Romans 2: 29, "But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in **the spirit**, and **not** in the letter." God did not push reluctant people into the work: He gave them the enthusiasm to get on with the job. There is all the difference in the world between doing something reluctantly because it has to be done, and tackling a task with zeal and enthusiasm. Just look at the enthusiasm in Exodus 35: 21, "And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom **his spirit** made willing, and they brought the Lord's offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation." Paul could say, "For God is my witness, whom I serve with **my spirit** in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers", Romans 1: 9. If we are only 'going through the motions' in our service for God, it won't be long before we grind to a halt. The Lord Jesus said, "I **delight** to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within **my heart**", Psalm 40: 8.

c) The energy. "They came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God." Not 'they came to the services', but "they came and did work." Most assemblies have a core of workers plus a 'fringe membership.' **You** will have to decide where **you** belong, and if it's the second category, transfer to the first **now!**

d) The expedition. They certainly didn't 'hang about.' The work recommenced in twenty-four days. The ministry of Haggai certainly expedited the work. Just twenty-four days. How long does it take for Bible teaching to become effective in **our** lives?

17.11.2000