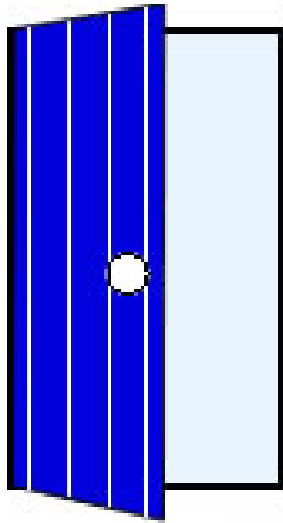


BIBLE STUDIES



Mill Lane Chapel

Haggai

(5) "From this day will I bless you"

Read Chapter 2: 10-23

We must remind ourselves, for the last time, that 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

As we have seen, the first message can be divided into two sections: **(A)** The reproof, V1-11: "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways." **(B)** The result, V12-15: "They came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God."

2) TO RESTORE THEIR CONFIDENCE, 2: 1-9

As we have also seen, the second message was addressed, in the first place, to the 'senior citizens' in Jerusalem. They had lived long enough to remember the original temple, and were evidently making unfavourable comparisons between the old building and the new one. We, would probably call them 'wet blankets', but God deals with them gently. (He is far more gracious than we are!). He speaks to them about past memories (V3), present encouragement (V4-5), and prospective glory (V6-9). We must now turn our attention to the two remaining messages. So:

3) TO REBUKE THEIR UNHOLINESS, 2: 10-19

We must notice **(a)** that this message was delivered approximately two months after the encouraging message to the senior citizens in Jerusalem, and **(b)** that it was delivered on the very day that the foundation of the temple was laid: see V18. It contained a serious charge, and yet it also contained a wonderful promise.

i) The serious charge. The people were unclean. "So is this people.....and that which they offer there is unclean", V14. Since unholiness is such a serious matter, we must conclude that this was something that had happened in the previous two months, otherwise the subject would have been raised much earlier in Haggai's ministry. Notice the present tense: 'So **is** this people, and so **is** this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so **is** every work of their hands; and that which they offer there (i.e. on the altar) **is** unclean.'" Things had evidently gone badly wrong since the last message, and this emphasises that progress must be accompanied by unceasing vigilance. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take

heed lest he fall", 1 Corinthians 10: 12. Decline can begin so quickly.

Whilst we are not specifically told why God was obliged to speak to His people in this way, the context strongly suggests that within two months, the enthusiasm of the people had begun to wane, and their offerings and sacrifices had become an empty form. M.C.Unger observes that 'initial zeal to obey the Lord with whole-hearted enthusiasm.....had begun to abate, despite the glowing promise of future blessing (V6-9).' (*Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*). The situation can be described by Isaiah 29: 13, "This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart from me." Defilement can take many forms, and be contracted in various ways. We learn here that the sin of hypocrisy is as objectionable to God as moral evil. This should make **us** search our hearts.

ii) The wonderful promise. "From this day will I bless you", V19. This seems quite sudden and unexpected, until we remember that the promise was made on the very day that the temple foundation was laid. Their zeal in obeying the Lord and been rekindled. They proved the reality of their devotion to Him, and He therefore promises divine blessing. The lesson for **us** is very clear!

We must now consider the details. The passage can be divided as follows: **(A)** Defilement by sin, V11-14; **(B)** Judgement by God, V15-17; **(C)** Assurance of blessing, V18-19. God invites them **(i)** to look back, V15-17, and **(ii)** to look forward, V18-19. Notice the repetition of **"consider"** and **"now"**, V15 & 18. (Compare 1: 5 and 1: 7: the word "consider" means, 'set your heart on, or 'give attention'). The matter was urgent. They must give it their consideration "now." Notice the repetition of, **"this day and upward"**, V15 & 18. Notice the contrasting 'days': "since **those days** were.....from **this day** will I bless you", V16 & V19. Notice the contrast between "I **smote** you" (V17) and "will I **bless** you" (V19).

A) DEFILEMENT BY SIN, V11-14

"In the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying.....", V10-11. As J.G.Baldwin (*Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*) observes, 'Haggai's question is not asking for information, but is a methodological device familiar to every teacher. The exchange of question and answer arouses and sustains interest.' We must also notice the way God approaches the subject **(i)** He establishes the facts (V12-13), and **(ii)** He applies those facts (V14). God's lessons are always built on solid foundations. Let every Sunday School teacher, Bible Class leader, preacher and teacher, take careful note!

i) The facts established

The priests were certainly the best people to answer the two questions which follow: "If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these (i.e. bread, pottage etc.), shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean", V12-13. Whilst, as we have noticed, God's people had become defiled by their lack of reality, the lessons are applicable in all cases of unholiness:

a) Holiness is not transmissible, V12. The "holy flesh" was the priest's portion of a sacrifice offered to God. See, for example, Numbers 6: 20. 1 Corinthians 9: 13 will help us here: "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?" Let's remember that holiness is separation or consecration to God. Unconsecrated food did not change by contact with consecrated food. This reminds us that we can mix with devoted and consecrated Christians, but remain unholy and unconsecrated ourselves. M.C.Unger puts it like this: 'Sanctity or holiness cannot be imparted or acquired apart from vital faith and obedience to the Lord, for it flows from contact with Him.'

b) Defilement is transmissible, V13. The words, "unclean by a dead body", probably refer to Numbers 19 which details the ordinance of the red heifer. This particular sacrifice was God's provision for people who had contracted defilement. "He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days.....whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the Lord.....and whatsoever that unclean person toucheth shall be unclean; and the soul that toucheth it shall be unclean until even." We all know, only too well, how easily we can be defiled by things we see, hear and think, and how easily such uncleanness can affect every part of our lives, and the lives of others. Defilement is contagious. We can understand the injunction, "Wherefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate saith the Lord, and touch not (or 'watch not.....listen not.....read not') the unclean thing.....let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God", 2 Corinthians 6: 17 - 7: 1.

To sum up, these verses contrast the limited effect of holiness (holy flesh - the priests - but no holiness conveyed) with the unlimited effect of defilement (dead body - the person involved - uncleanness conveyed).

ii) The facts applied

"Then answered Haggai, and said, **So** is this people, and **so** is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and **so** is every work of their hands; and that which they offer

there is unclean." The people had become defiled themselves, and their uncleanness had tainted their work and their worship. The nation had become defiled, and everything it touched, including its offerings, had become unclean. Once again, we encounter the expression, "this people." Compare 1: 2. But now it is accompanied by another similar expression, "this nation." They didn't speak or behave like God's people. They had forgotten the demands of their holy God: "For I am the Lord your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy", Leviticus 11: 44. See also 19: 2 and 20: 26. They had forgotten that "holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever", Psalm 93: 5. They had also forgotten that God had expressed his total displeasure in the past by chastening them. So:

B) JUDGEMENT FROM GOD, V15-19

Uncleanness, in this case the uncleanness of an empty religion, is most serious, and must be dealt with immediately. This is emphasised by the words, "And **now**, I pray you, consider....." So: "And **now**, I pray you, **consider** from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord. Since **those days** were, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten.....**I smote you** with blasting, and with mildew, and with hail, in all the labours of your hands; yet ye turned not to me saith the Lord."

The people are told to **look back**, and assess the situation **before** "a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord." God had not stood on the sidelines, and allowed His people to forget His interests and persist in their backsliding. He chastened them with a view to their recovery. "**I** smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith the Lord." These were not natural disasters: they were 'acts of God' in the truest sense. See Deuteronomy 28: 22 etc. Haggai is obviously referring to the disasters described in 1: 6 and 1: 9-11. See also Zechariah 8: 9-10. Compare Amos 4: 9. Perhaps Haggai was referring to the preaching of Amos here. We know that the prophets read each other's books. See Daniel 9: 2.

Whilst the "foundation of the temple of the Lord" had certainly been laid some sixteen years before (see Ezra 3: 10), there can be little doubt that the words, "consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord", refer to the period immediately preceeding the recommencement of work in 1: 14-15. Hebrew scholars tells us that the words "this day and **upward**", can signify movement either backwards or forwards in time. Hence J.N.Darby's footnote: 'some take it as meaning 'backward' in V15.'

The important thing to notice is that God's chastening had been rejected. "Ye turned not to me, saith the Lord." How do we respond to God's dealings with us? Do remember what we said in connection with 1: 9-11: 'If, on reflection, you discover that God has "called for a drought" in your soul, and there is no spiritual joy, fruit, or progress in your life, turn to Him in confession and repentance. He is

longing to say, "From this day will I bless you", 2: 19.'

If God had taught His people that disobedience brought chastening, then He now teaches them that obedience brings blessing. So:

C) ASSURANCE OF BLESSING, V18-19

Haggai now invites them to **look forward**. Having described the situation **before** "a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord", he now describes the situation from that very day: "Consider now from **this day** and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from **the day** that the foundation of the Lord's house was laid, consider it." Preparatory work recommenced as a result of the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah. See Ezra 5: 1: "Then Zerubbabel.....and Joshua.....with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God.....and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God", 1: 12-14.

Once again, the "day that the foundation of the Lord's house was laid" evidently refers, not to the laying of the temple foundation some sixteen years before, but to the date on which the builders actually recommenced work after three months preparation (compare 1: 15 and 2: 18). Now the message is refreshingly different. The defilement of their unreality in worship had given place to genuine zeal for God's glory. "Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? Yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: **from this day will I bless you.**" Compare the similar language in Zechariah 8: 11-12: "But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the Lord of hosts, for the seed **shall** be prosperous; the vine **shall** give her fruit, and the ground **shall** give her increase....."

Bearing in mind that this was the middle of winter, the seed had not yet been sown, and no one would have dared to forecast the quality of the next year's harvest. After all, recent experience gave no cause for optimism. Their crops had been attacked by "blasting and with mildew and with hail", V17. But anxiety and uncertainty gave place to assurance, with the divine promise, "From this day will I bless you." Whilst there was no firm evidence of an abundant harvest, since it was too early to make any predictions, they had something far better than evidence. They had the certainty of God's word. **We** have this too: "Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord", 1 Corinthians 15: 58. "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not", Galatians 6: 9.

On this happy note, Haggai concludes his ministry to the people at large. His final message was addressed to Zerubbabel personally. It was a message of encouragement. It was

4) TO REWARD THEIR LEADER, 2: 20-23

"And again the word of the Lord came unto Haggai in the four and twentieth day of the month, saying, Speak now to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah." He is called, "O Zerubbabel, my servant", V23. He was a 'key player' at this period of Israel's history. His role is acknowledged by God in Zechariah 4. "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.....The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands also shall finish it.....For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel", V7-10. It is rather interesting to compare the promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7. Both men either built, or proposed to build, a house for God. "Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build me an house to dwell in?.....Also the Lord telleth thee that he will make thee an house", V5 & 11. Now, centuries later, Zerubbabel is promised a glorious future. God is no man's debtor! We must consider the following:

A) THE TIME, V21-22

"I will shake the heavens and the earth; and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother." This is followed by the words, "In that day", which point forward to the end-time. See, for example, Isaiah 11: 10-11, and 12: 1.

i) The power of God over creation. We have already encountered the words, "I will shake the heavens and the earth." See 2: 6. The effect on men and women is described in Isaiah 2: 19, "And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth, 2: 19-21. Compare Revelation 6: 12-17.

ii) The power of God over empires. We must bear in mind that Zerubbabel was "governor of Judah", not 'king of Judah', and therefore subject to the king of Persia. It was "the times of the Gentiles." Zerubbabel is now conducted across the centuries to the end of Gentile domination, when God will "overthrow the throne of kingdoms.....and destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen." The "throne of kingdoms" is the throne of the "the beast." See Revelation 13: 2 and 16: 10. He will be a world ruler. Hence the title, "the throne of kingdoms." The "kingdoms of the heathen" are the "ten kings" who will "give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled", Revelation 17: 12 & 17. See also Revelation 19: 19. The self-destruction ("every one by the sword of his brother"), is also described in Zechariah 14: 13.

B) THE MAN, V23

Whilst, of course, the Lord Jesus will reign as "King of kings, and Lord of lords", this passage clearly refers to Zerubbabel himself. "In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the Lord." Zerubbabel is named personally, and so is his father! Although most commentators tell us that this verse refers to the Lord Jesus, 'of Whom Zerubbabel was a type' (quote), it does seem obvious that Zerubbabel, like David (see Jeremiah 30: 9, Ezekiel 24: 23-24, Hosea 3: 5 etc), will have a role in the coming kingdom. Having shaken "the heavens and the earth", and overthrown "the strength of the kingdoms", God will establish **His** kingdom, in which Zerubbabel will have an important place. This brings us to:

C) THE REWARD, V23

"In that day will I take thee.....and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts." Past faithfulness would bring future reward. Notice the sovereignty of God. He chooses and places His servants. See 1 Corinthians 12: 18. The faithfulness of Zerubbabel must be contrasted with the unfaithfulness of his grandfather, Jehoiachin (Coniah): "As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence", Jeremiah 22: 24. Now the sentence is reversed. 'The signet ring, engraved with the king's seal, was used to endorse all official documents (see Esther 8: 10). It was so precious that, to guard against theft, it was usually worn on the king's person.' (J.G.Baldwin). The words, "I.....will make thee as a signet", therefore emphasise the security of Zerubbabel, the closeness of his relationship with God, and the importance of his future role.

A signet conveys the authority of its owner. How much do **we** convey the authority of our divine Master? A signet was used to make an impression. Are **we** making an impression for the Lord Jesus?

It is immensely satisfying to read that both Haggai and Zechariah saw positive results from their ministry: "And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia", Ezra 6: 14.

Will there be positive results in OUR lives as a result of Haggai's preaching?

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