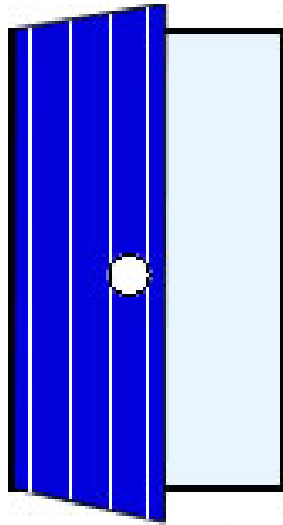


BIBLE STUDIES



Mill Lane Chapel

Haggai

(1) Introduction

Read Ezra 4: 23-24; 5: 1-2, 6: 14, Haggai 1: 1-2, 2: 1-3, 2: 10-13, 2: 20-23

Whatever else we say about Haggai, we must not call him a 'Minor Prophet!' He is part of the 'twelve-jewelled crown of the Old Testament', and in any case, there is nothing 'minor' about a man described as "the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message!" Unlike the majority of his colleagues in the 'book of the Twelve', Haggai is mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament, and this will help us to introduce him. In this introduction, we will endeavour to cover the following: **(1)** The circumstances of his ministry; **(2)** The co-operation with Zechariah; **(3)** The content of his prophecy.

1) THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS MINISTRY

In this connection, we must address **(A)** The general background to his ministry, and **(B)** The immediate background to his ministry.

A) THE GENERAL BACKGROUND

Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi form a distinct group in the 'Book of the Twelve.' They all preached after Israel's return, in BC 536, from their seventy-year captivity in Babylon, and this has earned them the title, 'the post-exilic prophets.' This means that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which deal with the same period, become compulsory reading. Without going into fine detail, the five books fall into two groups:

i) Ezra, Haggai, and Zechariah. The cross-references are clear. See, for example, Ezra 5: 1-2. The principle event is the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem.

ii) Nehemiah and Malachi. The deterioration described in Nehemiah 13 evidently continued, and Malachi was obliged to address the decline amongst God's people. The principle event is the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem.

B) THE IMMEDIATE BACKGROUND

This is described in Ezra 4: 23-24, "Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power. Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia." Sadly, God's people meekly accepted the situation. They blithely put God's interests 'on hold', and energetically pursued their own affairs with the excuse, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built", Haggai 1: 2. There is not the slightest hint of mourning or regret, and no cry to God for help. (Compare

Ezra 3: 3 and 5: 5). However, building work recommenced, after some fifteen years, in the second year of Darius (see Ezra 4: 24 and Haggai 1: 14-15) as the result of the stirring ministry of Haggai and Zechariah. See Ezra 5: 1-2. Whilst Ezra tells us that Haggai and Zechariah "prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem", the two prophets tell us themselves what they actually said!

2) THE CO-OPERATION WITH ZECHARIAH

Whilst Haggai does not mention Zechariah, and Zechariah does not mention Haggai, we know that the two prophets worked together in happy fellowship. We must pursue this subject with particular reference to Ezra 5: 1-2, and 6: 14. There are valuable lessons here for us all. We must notice:

*i) **The character of their ministry.*** "Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, **prophesied** unto the Jews." Jeremiah 23: 16-22 describe false prophets, but we also learn that the true prophet "stood in the counsel of the Lord, and hath perceived and heard His word", V18. The prophetic ministry involved **fellowship with God**. There is all the difference in the world between an address and a message. An address means time in the study, but a message means time in the study, and in the **sanctuary**. We tend to hear more addresses than messages. But don't reserve criticism for preachers: we **all** need to pray more over our service for God.

*ii) **The emphasis on their ministry.*** We know very little about Haggai and Zechariah personally. But we do know a great deal about their ministry. This is important. We tend to place importance on a preacher's background, connections and personality, rather than on his service for God. Paul makes the point quite forcibly in 1 Corinthians 3: 5, 'Who then is Apollos, and who Paul? Ministering **servants**, through whom ye have believed, and as the Lord has given to each', JND. The RV is even more emphatic: '**What** then is Apollos? and **what** is Paul? Ministers through whom ye believed; and each as the Lord gave to him.'

*iii) **The arrangement of their ministry.*** Both men began to preach in the "second year of Darius the king", but they certainly didn't get under one another's feet! Notice when they preached:

Haggai	6th. month: see 1: 1
Haggai:	7th. month: see 2: 1
Zechariah:	8th. month: see 1: 1
Haggai:	9th. month: see 2: 10
Zechariah:	11th. month: see 1: 7

We must notice that these men only preached once they had received "the word of the Lord." We read this on each of these five occasions. So we can now understand why the prophets didn't take any meetings in the 10th. month. There

was no word from the Lord. It would have been quite wrong for them to preach, and if they had done so, God would have been obliged to say, "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied", Jeremiah 23: 21.

The harmony between Haggai and Zechariah in this way illustrates 1 Corinthians 14: 40, "Let all things be done decently and in order." This verse summarises previous teaching in the chapter: for example, "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. **For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints**", V29-33. There was no competition, collision, chaos or confusion amongst God's servants in Ezra 5, and there will be none today if we are all in fellowship with God.

Haggai and Zechariah evidently belonged to different age groups. Whilst it is sometimes inferred from Haggai 2: 2 that the prophet was one of the "ancient men" (Ezra 4: 12), it is quite certain that Zechariah was a young man. See Zechariah 2: 4. It is therefore not unreasonable to think of these two men as older and younger respectively. We have only to think of Moses and Joshua in the Old Testament, and Paul and Timothy in the New Testament, to see the importance of older and younger believers working together.

iv) The variety in their ministry. Whilst, as we have seen, the two men worked harmoniously together, their ministry was quite different. C.E.Hocking puts it nicely: this is 'a grand illustration of the blending of ministries, the complementary character of their teaching effecting the desired result. Haggai's stirring words were aimed at the **conscience**. The Spirit convicted his hearers as he cuttingly asked, "Is it time, O ye?" (1: 3). Zechariah's ministry however was directed to the **heart**.' (Note the order) 'He indicated in his visions and prophecies the coming glories of "that day." He urged unbounded enthusiasm in the work of God's house in the light of the future prosperity and blessedness of Zion.' C.E.Hocking continues, 'How important for the spiritual welfare of God's people and the furtherance of His work is a ministry aimed at conscience and heart, combining challenge and comfort, leading to thought and action.' (*The Work of Reconstruction*: Precious Seed, Jan./Feb.1958).

v) The authority of their ministry. Their preaching was "in the Name of the Lord God of Israel", V1. This was not an empty statement. For example, as we have already noticed, "In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came **the word of the Lord**, by Haggai the prophet, unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest", Haggai 1: 1. Our authority is no less: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power (authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations (make disciples of all nations), baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the

Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you", Matthew 28: 18-20. There is no such thing as 'the teaching of the church', but we gladly acknowledge the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and the authority of the word of God.

vi) The example of their ministry. "And with them were the prophets of God **helping them**", V2. So Haggai and Zechariah were more than 'platform men.' Having delivered their messages, they rolled up their sleeves (better, 'girded themselves!') and got stuck into the work with everybody else. They were "ensamples to the flock." Ministry is more effective when the servant is an example of his own teaching. Hence 1 Timothy 4: 11-12, "These things command and teach. Let no man despise thy youth; but **be thou an example** of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." Hence Titus 2: 6-7, "Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things shewing **thyself a pattern of good works**." See also 1 Peter 5: 3. The Lord Jesus was the perfect example of His own ministry, see Acts 1: 1.

We ought to say here that this was certainly not 'a flash in a pan.' Haggai and Zechariah kept on preaching. See 6: 14, "And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo." C.E.Hocking has a very pertinent piece here: 'In order that God's work might prosper, more than a week-end's ministry or the presenting of a fine address at a weeknight gathering will be needed. Consistently and consecutively, God's whole counsel will need to be unfolded to the saints.'

3) THE CONTENT OF HIS PROPHECY

The book of Haggai comprises four messages (1: 1, 2: 1, 2: 10, 2: 20), although it is arguable that there were actually five messages. See 1: 13-15. Perhaps we can compromise by saying that the first message was in two parts! Both parts deal with the same subject. The four messages can be summarised as follows: **(A)** To reprove their idleness, 1: 1-15, **(B)** To restore their confidence, 2: 1-9; **(C)** To rebuke their unholiness, 2: 10-19, **(D)** To reward their leader, 2: 20-23. We will say a little about each of these messages in preparation for more detailed study.

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

The first two messages have a double edge. They are addressed to Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest. See 1: 1 and 2: 2. This conveys an important lesson. Think about it! The first message can be divided in this way: **(i)** The reproof, V2-11, and **(ii)** The response, V12-15.

i) The reproof, V2-11. Interest in God's house had declined, but interest in their own houses had increased. Hence the statement, "This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built" (V2), and the question, "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?"

(V4). But God did not allow His people to settle down in their self-interest and self-indulgence. He cannot bless self-centredness, and their disappointment and frustration (V6) was the direct result of divine intervention: "Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house", V9. But don't end there: read V10-11 as well. They explain that the drought was no quirk of nature. Compare 2: 15-19.

What about conditions in **our** lives? Lack of joy and satisfaction, and lack of progress, are signals that something is desperately wrong. Compare the situation with events in Acts 4 & 5. It is a contrast rather than a comparison! The disciples were forbidden to speak (4: 18, 5: 28, 40) but they continued with the work (4: 31, 5: 42), and were filled with joy (5: 41).

Does the work of God really concern us? Does difficulty or opposition, perhaps the surrounding apathy to the gospel, cause us grief and drive us to prayer? Or do we say in effect, "the time is not come.....?" The returning exiles had accomplished a great deal, but there was still a long way to go. Are **we** building for God? Are we **all** building for God? **What** are we building for God? **How** are we building for God? The people were back in the right place - the place of the Name (see Deuteronomy 14: 23-24 etc) - but that was all. Some of God's people are happy and content to be in 'assembly fellowship', and gather to the Name (Matthew 18: 20), but that is all! God was not displeased because the second temple was inferior to Solomon's temple (2: 3), but because His interests were entirely neglected. Haggai's first message was essentially a call to action. God's interests must be pursued.

ii) The response, V12-15. The reproof included a call for activity. "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord", V8. To their credit, the people, led by Zerubbabel and Joshua, responded in twenty-four days. How long does it take for ministry to become effective in **our** lives? They were certainly "doers of the word, and not hearers only", James 1: 22. We must notice the attitude in which they resumed the work. They "obeyed the voice of the Lord their God.....the people did fear before the Lord", and in that frame of mind, "they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God." We must remember that the Christian life involves unquestioning obedience to the word of God (remember 1 Samuel 15: 22), and that the "fear of the Lord" is a reverential awe which will not permit anything in our lives which will grieve or displease Him.

Whilst, as we have seen, God cannot bless self-centredness, He **can** and **will** bless His people when they give priority to His interests. In the first place, He affirms His presence with them: "I am with you saith the Lord", 1: 13. In the second place, He affirms His intention to bless them: "From this day will I bless you", 2: 19. The second message was

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

This is a message of encouragement for the older people at Jerusalem. They are called the "ancient men" in Ezra 3: 12-13. "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? And how do ye see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" The second temple, in course of erection, was a poor substitute for the original building, and we can imagine the despair and disappointment of the 'senior citizens' who had actually seen Solomon's temple before its destruction by the Babylonians. God encourages them in two ways:

i) He assures them of His presence as they rebuild, V4-5. "Yet now be strong.....and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts." He is the covenant-keeping God, V5. He will not let them down.

ii) He assures them of His purpose for the future, V6-9. The coming glory of the temple will exceed its past glory! "I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts", V8. "The glory of this latter house (JND, 'the latter glory of this house') shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts", V9. The "ancient men" are urged to look ahead to a glorious future which will exceed 'the good old days!'

Notice that although three different buildings are involved, one "house" is envisaged throughout: "Who is left among you that saw **this house** in her first glory? (V3).....the glory of this latter house ('the latter glory of **this house**') shall be greater than of the former" (V9). The coming glory of the temple will follow the catastrophic and cataclysmic judgements at the end-time (V6-7). The phrase, "desire of all nations", may not be a direct reference to the Messiah, but it certainly refers to His reign.

This message is an encouragement to us as well. Think about the history of the church. We can look back, and see its "first glory" in the book of Acts, and could easily be overtaken with despair as we compare the past with the present. But the 'latter glory' will be 'greater than the former!' The Lord Jesus will "present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing", Ephesians 5: 27. It is always helpful to learn the lessons of the past, but it is distinctly unhelpful to be preoccupied with the past! We can look with confidence to the future. But in the meantime, we must "**work**: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts." The third message was

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

This message teaches us the important lesson that sin and defilement are highly contagious, and that clean lives are a pre-requisite for divine blessing. We learn that God is holy, and demands the same quality in His people. This section can be divided as follows **(a)** The existence of uncleanness, V11-14, and **(b)** The evidence of uncleanness, V15-19.

a) The existence of uncleanness, V11-14

The lesson is clear: holy things do **not** impart their holiness to others, V12; but defiled things **do** impart their defilement to others, V13. No one could speak with more authority about this than the priests, and the sad lesson follows: "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." Because they were defiled, God could not accept "the work of their hands", and "that which they offer." Now read 1 Peter 1: 14-16.

b) The evidence of uncleanness, V15-19

God invites the people to "consider" the lessons. He invites them to "consider" the situation **"before"** a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord" (V15-17), and **"from"** the day that the foundation of the Lord's house was laid" (V18-19). In both cases, He had withheld blessing, but now, since the people "did fear before the Lord" (1: 12), He could promise blessing: "From this day will I bless you." The fourth message was

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

This message is addressed to Zerubbabel personally. "Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah.....In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the Lord, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts."

Whilst most commentators tell us that this section refers to the Lord Jesus, 'of Whom Zerubbabel was a type' (quote), it seems very clear that it does refer to Zerubbabel himself. Like David (see Jeremiah 30: 9, Ezekiel 24: 23-24, Hosea 3: 5 etc), Zerubbabel 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. "In that day will I take thee.....and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts." 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?

We cannot end our introduction to the book of Haggai without noticing the achievements of his 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.

20.10.2000