

Commentary on the Book of Haggai

Haggai 1

1In the second year of Darius the king, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying,
2"Thus says the LORD of hosts, "This people says, "The time has not come, even the time for the house of the LORD to be rebuilt.'""

Haggai ministered as a prophet of the Lord during the time of the Jews' captivity in Persia. God gave him a message to give to Zerubbabel, the civil leader whom God has chosen to lead the work of rebuilding the temple, and to Joshua, the religious leader of the people. Persia had given the Jews freedom to worship and govern their own affairs, more or less, but they remained more interested in hoarding things for themselves rather than in building a house for the Lord. The people kept saying that the time had not yet come for them to rebuild their temple, but God had other desires.

3Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying,
4"Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?"

5Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, "Consider your ways!
6"You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes."

7Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Consider your ways!
8"Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified," says the LORD.

God's house lay desolate while the people lived in paneled houses. God rebukes them and challenges them to consider their ways, which He obviously views as being in error. The people live in difficult economic conditions, ultimately as a result of their sin against God. They work hard to plant crops, but the harvest is meager. They don't have much to drink, and their wages go into purses with holes. They don't even have enough clothing to keep warm when it is cool. Yet they ignore God in their time of need, and God calls to them through Haggai to change their ways. God gives them direction to go get wood from the mountains so that they can rebuild the temple. He is not asking for the glorious temple of Solomon's time but a mere house of wood. It is the people's hearts that He is interested in. He knows that they don't have much, but He wants them to give from what they have so as to demonstrate their faith and reverence for Him.

9"You look for much, but behold, it comes to little; when you bring it home, I blow it away Why?" declares the LORD of hosts, "Because of My house which lies desolate, while each of you runs to his own house.

10"Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew and the earth has withheld its produce.

11"I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands."

God explains that He is behind the poor economic conditions and the difficult conditions for growing crops. He is not blessing them with rain and produce, but He has cursed the land, the cattle, the people, and their provisions, even all the work of their hands. This is because He loves them and recognizes that they need to repent and worship Him. He has been merciful to them even in their captivity, yet still they ignore the One Who has preserved them. Each of the people had a house, but God didn't have a house. This needed to change.

12Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, 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 showed reverence for the LORD.

13Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke by the commission of the LORD to the people saying, " 'I am with you,' declares the LORD."

God had given the people direction, and finally they listened. The leaders of the people along with the rest of the people obeyed God and His Word, thereby showing reverence and respect for the authority of God. Their fear of the Lord led them to act wisely (Proverbs 1:7). The Lord through Haggai (who is emphasized as the messenger of the Lord and commissioned of the Lord, which gives gravity to what He says as being the very Word of the Lord and indeed a true prophet of God) says that He is with the people, implying that He will help them with the task and that He will bless them as a result of their obedience. His favor is once again with the people. This demonstrates His merciful nature and His patience and lovingkindness toward Israel and to all His children.

14So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God,

15on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of Darius the king.

God had first spoken through Haggai on the first of the month, and now it was the twenty-fourth of the month. It took the people twenty-four days to obey, but still God delighted in seeing them repent. He is indeed very merciful and patient. Once the people agreed to have faith, God moved in their spirits to have strength to get to the task at hand. All God asks of us is that we trust Him and revere Him. He will enable and strengthen. As He told to Zerubbabel in Zechariah 4:6, "Then he said to me, 'This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,'" says the

LORD of hosts.'” It is by the power of God that the work of God is accomplished as the people of God put their faith in God.

Haggai 2

1On the twenty-first of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet saying,

2"Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people saying,

3'Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison?

4'But now take courage, Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD, 'take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage,' declares the LORD, 'and work; for I am with you,' declares the LORD of hosts.

5'As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!'

6"For thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land.

7'I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD of hosts.

8'The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,' declares the LORD of hosts.

9'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and in this place I will give peace,' declares the LORD of hosts."

The people don't hear from the Lord through Haggai until the twenty-first of the following month. So nearly a month passes as they work on the temple until they hear from God again. God always gives us what we need to know when we need to know it. The temple that the people saw being constructed before their eyes was nothing like the one of Solomon's day. Those who had lived to see Solomon's temple wept when they saw this one (Ezra 3:12). Yet God's command was to take heart and be courageous, believing that He was still with them even though their temple was not all that impressive. The more important factor was that their God was with them, and God is never lacking for power, majesty, and awe, even if His earthly "house" is of mere wood. God reminds the people of Israel of His promise to them from when they left Egypt. His Spirit will always be with them, and His covenant to them is sure. Jerusalem will be a place of blessing in the future, specifically during the millennial kingdom. At that time, the wealth of the earth will flood into the city, for God will be there, blessing it. There will be peace in that place, and its glory in the future will be even greater than it was in Solomon's day. So the people needed to put their hope in the fact that God's promises will come true and that the best is yet to come. Even if there was no silver or gold in this particular temple, God is the owner of all silver and gold. He will have what He wants when He wants it. For now, wood would suffice, and His desire was for the people to trust Him and worship Him.

10On the twenty-fourth of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Haggai the prophet, saying,

11"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Ask now the priests for a ruling:

12'If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches bread with this fold, or cooked food, wine, oil, or any other food, will it become holy?'" And the priests answered, "No."

13Then Haggai said, "If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will the latter become unclean?" And the priests answered, "It will become unclean."

14Then Haggai said, " 'So is this people. And so is this nation before Me,' declares the LORD, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.

15'But now, do consider from this day onward: before one stone was placed on another in the temple of the LORD,

16from that time when one came to a grain heap of twenty measures, there would be only ten; and when one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there would be only twenty.

17'I smote you and every work of your hands with blasting wind, mildew and hail; yet you did not come back to Me,' declares the LORD.

18'Do consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month; from the day when the temple of the LORD was founded, consider:

19'Is the seed still in the barn? Even including the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree, it has not borne fruit. Yet from this day on I will bless you.'"

About two months later, God again spoke to the people through Haggai. The Lord gives the priests a lesson in true religion. First, He has them acknowledge that merely touching food with a holy garment does not make the food holy. Second, He has them acknowledge that touching a corpse and then touching food makes the food unclean. The point is that the people were unclean, and thus God's blessing was not with them because of their sin. It didn't matter what they did because their very touch "contaminated" because it lacked the blessing of God. Their vats were never full, and their grain heaps were always small. God sent wind, mildew, and hail to get their attention, but they didn't come back to Him. Now, however, in the ninth month, things were going to become different. The lack of blessing occurred before the people obeyed in placing the stones at the foundation of the temple. Now the temple was officially founded, and God's promise to the people was that from this point on He would bless them. They did what He had asked, demonstrating faith, and the blessing and favor of God had returned. This had to be great news for them. They could expect rain once again along with produce and more to eat and drink.

20Then the word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying,

21"Speak to Zerubbabel governor of Judah, saying, 'I am going to shake the heavens and the earth.

22'I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the power of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down, everyone by the sword of another.'

23'On that day,' declares the LORD of hosts, 'I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant,' declares the LORD, 'and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you,'" declares the LORD of hosts.

Also on this same day of the ninth month, God told Haggai to deliver a message to Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was the leader of the people, and God wanted to honor him for his faithfulness throughout this challenging task. He didn't give up, but he pressed on to the end. God, speaking of the last events on the earth during the tribulation period, says that kingdoms will fall and horses and riders will perish. Yet, during that time, God will remember Zerubbabel, and He will honor him, reward him, and use him. Just as a signet ring is precious to a king, even communicating his very authority, so Zerubbabel will be a minister of the Most High God, serving under His authority and in His name. He will be blessed for having been faithful, which is consistent with the nature of God (2 Corinthians 5:10).

By Brent Barnett of www.relevantbibleteaching.com