

## SESSION #49

### HAGGAI

We return again to the books of prophecy, beginning with Haggai.

#### 1. Context

Let's see the context for the remaining three books of prophecy, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, which are collectively called the "Post-Exilic Prophets", meaning "after the Exile". They are also sometimes referred to as the "Restoration Prophets". They have a particular job as God's prophets at that particular time in the history of God's people. And that is to help the people get restored in their life and walk with God.

Jeremiah's task, to some degree, had been to develop a sin-consciousness among the people of God as he talked so strongly and often about judgment.

Ezekiel wanted to produce a God-consciousness among them. That's why he constantly pointed to God and His glory.

Daniel wanted God's people to have a kingdom-consciousness so he described the kingdoms of this world in direct opposition to the glorious kingdom of God.

Now, Haggai and Zechariah come along with a different theme in view: to help God's people gain a new sense of self-consciousness, not in a bad or egotistical sense but in a good sense. Here are a people who have been devastated by the destruction of their nation, gone into exile for 70 years, then come back again and are attempting to rebuild their nation. They needed a renewed belief in their position as the people of God. *God hasn't deserted us. He still works with us; we still belong to Him!* Haggai's ministry, then, is one of great encouragement and sometimes challenge along those lines.

Haggai was among the first group who returned to Jerusalem, led by Zerubbabel, as you see on the timeline chart. He is there to encourage the people as they rebuild the temple. He is a companion of Zechariah and together they formed a team in prophetic ministry.

By this time, early in the return to the Land, the people were becoming self-satisfied, apathetic and losing interest in the things of God. In fact, the temple which they started rebuilding with such enthusiasm only had the foundation laid down and then they stopped. And they didn't do any more work on the temple for 14 years! Into that 14-year gap come Haggai and Zechariah as God's messengers to encourage them to get back on the job, to recover the right priorities again.

## 2. Message

Haggai's famous message, found in 1:2-9, is simply to *"put first things first"*. *You've neglected*, he said, *the building of God's house for 14 years but it was supposed to be priority #1. How come you're not doing it?* And then he gives God's message to them. *"God is working with you and you may not even recognize it but here are the signs that God has been working on you to move you back to the right priorities."*

Verse 6 tells us: *"You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages only to put them in a bag with holes in it."* All the money you earn just seems to go right through your pocket. Before the end of the month comes, it's all gone. Why?

In verse 7 God says, *"Consider your ways!"* God's message is that He is trying to tell you something through your finances. Your priorities are not right. Verse 9 says: *"you expected much but it turned out to be little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away."*

Ah, maybe we invest in certain stocks and have great expectations and then the market takes a nose-dive and the return we expected doesn't happen. Perhaps sometimes – I'm not saying *all* the time – God may be speaking to us through our financial affairs like He did to Haggai's people, trying to get our attention so He can move us back to the right priorities.

Put first things first. We so easily get things backwards just as God's people in that day got things backwards. They were so busy working on their own homes and on their own priorities to the point that they left God out.

Why did God blow all their resources away, Haggai says? *"Because of my [God's] house which remains a ruin while each of you is busy with his own house."* Their priorities were upside-down, backwards, mixed up. They had become focussed on building up their own houses, their own businesses etc. – all the things that they wanted to do for themselves. And they neglected the things of God. So, Haggai has to come with a very strong message about priorities.

### **3. Important Date**

As he does so, he focusses their attention on a particular date. In 2:18 we read this phrase, *"From this day, God says, I will bless you."* What day?

Jeremiah had prophesied that there would be 70 years of exile and desolation from the date of the destruction of the temple until God would once again work with His people. Haggai indicates clearly that "this day" was the day they laid the temple foundation because it was exactly 70 years to the day since the siege of Jerusalem. And the people hadn't recognized the significance of those two dates. They had laid the foundation on a particular day, but then had left it saying, *"It is not the time"*.

Verse 2 of chapter 1 reads, *"This people says, 'The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built.'" It was just a rationalization so that they could focus on their own priorities. "It just wasn't the right time yet. We started too early."* And Haggai says, *"No you didn't. It was precisely 70 years from the destruction of the temple to the day you began laying the new foundation. And God had said that 'from that day' He would bless them."* The time had come.

### **4. Structure**

Haggai gives them four messages from God which provides us with something of a structure.

Message #1 was to arouse them, stir them up to get them back on track to build God's house. This has to be a strong message of reproof, of rebuke, of telling them, *"You're on the wrong track! You're not paying attention to the things God is doing in your lives to bring you back to the right priorities."*

The people had actually become paralyzed by their wrong attitude to prophecy. They said, *"the time has not yet come"*. So, they settled down to a lazy, apathetic contentment saying that God's house didn't need to be attended to because it wasn't the right time. But they misunderstood God's prophecy; it *was* the right time. If they had added up the dates they would have seen that it was precisely the right time indeed.

Sometimes we can fall into the very same excuses they did, rationalizing our way around what should be the #1 priority: putting God first in our lives. And we get busy with so many other things basically saying, like these people did, *"Well, it isn't time to do that. After all, if God wanted that to be done He would simply do it."* But that was basically saying that God's sovereignty is 100% of the picture. It isn't. 100% of the picture is also our responsibility. We hold these two apparent opposites in dynamic tension. They are meant to be cooperative. God will cooperate with us as we cooperate with Him.

Yes, He is sovereign indeed; He will do whatever He intends to do. But at the same time, in the mystery of His economy, He uses *us*. He expects us to be responsible. And the people of Haggai's day were not. They had fallen into a **false contentment**.

As they begin now to respond to that sharp message of reproof, Haggai delivers message #2. Now it is a message of support and encouragement. God said, *"I am with you"* (1:13 and 2:4). Don't lose heart.

One of the things which had been a great discouragement to them at the time, as they began rebuilding God's house, was a sense of **false discontent**. There were still a few people, old men apparently, who were still alive at this time but who had been little children at the time of the destruction of the first temple. They were sitting around on curb stones watching the younger men at work. As they watched, they muttered to the workers, *"Ah, you should have seen the temple I saw! Wow – Solomon's temple was fantastic! This temple you're building will never match up with that one."*

You can imagine what this would have done for the confidence of the younger workmen. *“Hey, thanks a lot! We don’t have the resources Solomon had. Of course, it’s not going to look anything like that glorious temple.”* And God comes along and tells them, *“Don’t listen to all those stories about ‘the good old days’. Don’t let that discourage you because you don’t understand something about the temple you are building.”*

In chapter 2:7 God says, *“I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory...”* God continues in verse 9: *“The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts.”*

What was he referring to? The temple they were now building would be the basic temple that Herod would reconstruct and expand in the time of Christ. And God was saying that the *“Desire of all nations”*, God in the flesh, will personally walk into that same temple they are building now in Haggai’s day. And God will fill that temple with His glory in a way that He never filled the temple that Solomon built. Because when Jesus comes He will be *“God with us!”*

What they are building may never look like Solomon’s in appearance, but God had a special place in His prophetic story for what would happen one day in this very building. *Don’t be discouraged*, He said. *I’m with you, and the house you’re building I am going to fill one day with the glory of my own personal presence in the person of my Son.*

Message #3 was to confirm and give them a sense of blessing. *“From this day,”* God had said, *“I will bless you. Now that you’re back on track again and my timetable is moving along.”* *“I will bless you now”* as a special sign of favor for their obedience as they work now on God’s priorities. This is, as it were, one side of a coin.

The other side of this sense of blessing was that it created a **false expectation** among many of them. The expectation was, *“If God is going to bless us, then all that money we lost through the holes in our pockets, will now come back to us! Everything is going to go well for me. I’m going to get rich!”* And the material benefits became a focus for the people. Haggai had to tell them that this wasn’t the way it works. Just because God said, *“From this day I will bless you”*, it doesn’t necessarily mean immediate material benefits. In their case, they might need to wait for some of those benefits.

In our case, be careful not to listen to the message of some preachers in our day who promise material benefits to those who do what the preacher says. We are not God's physical nation, like Israel; we are God's *spiritual* family. And He doesn't promise us great material blessings. Oh, if He gives you some, be grateful and conscious of the truth that He is the owner, we are only the stewards. False expectations can be our problem just as much as it was theirs.

Message #4 was one of assurance. "*From this day...the blessing.*" And "*from that day*" – a day yet to come – I will "*make you*" (2:23). Haggai is pointing to a future when Jesus the Messiah, a man from the line of David as Zerubbabel was, would some day come. And in "that day" God would fulfill all the promises and blessings He had spoken of for hundreds of years through the OT as these find a focal point in the Person of Jesus Christ. And we see once again, as in so many OT books, a pointing on toward the future which the NT would reveal, especially in terms of Jesus the Messiah.

Our next session, as you might expect, will deal with the book of Zechariah, Haggai's partner in ministry.

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