



Sermon Notes

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Title: Haggai: First Things First

Series: #6 of "The Post-Exilic Community"

1. Overview and placement of Haggai

- a. The historic context of all prophecy needs to be known in order to better understand the prophecy itself. *"Text taken out of context becomes pretext."* We must be students of the Bible and, like the Bereans (cf. Acts 17:11), examine what is taught or spoken (even within the church) in the light of our own personal biblical study.
- b. Around 50,000 exiles left Persia under Cyrus' order in the spring of 537BC to rebuild the Temple. In the fall of 537BC they re-established the altar, the accompanying sacrifices and celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles. Then in 536BC they laid the foundation of the Temple at which time opposition arose. Recall that Ez. 4:6-24 is chronologically out of place and belongs at the time of Nehemiah, but provides a long list of opposition the Jews had to overcome. Work stopped on the Temple for about 16 years until Haggai and Zechariah's ministry began in 520BC. Work was re-commenced upon the Temple and again more opposition arose, however, this time they persevered and in the process Darius re-discovered Cyrus' original decree, affirmed his own support of the work and added to the logistical support while ordering the Jews' enemies to stand down. (*In the end they were better off because of the opposition.*) After 4 years, the Temple was completed (20 years after first arriving in Jerusalem) and celebrated with great joy.
- c. Haggai first spoke in 520BC, then two months later Zechariah began his ministry. Haggai's messages are spread over a 4-month period (Aug. – Dec. 520BC), while Zechariah's are spread out more: Zech. 1-6 during the same time as Haggai, Zech. 7-8 are spoken 2 years later, and Zech. 9-14 are given nearly 20 years later. Excellent model of how prophecy can work within a community; submitted to leaders speaking for God.
- d. God wants to dwell among His people, not merely have a "drive-through" expiation of sins. First the Altar, then the Temple, and then the Walls.

2. The Four Messages

- a. Haggai 1:1-15 (around Aug. 29, 520BC) – *"The Disinterest of the People"*
 - i. We need to keep in mind that these Jews were very motivated having left Persia for the express purpose of rebuilding the Temple. They have already shown themselves to be quite fervent, yet...
 - ii. Opposition and business of life pushed God further and further to the fringes. They seem to have spiritualized the opposition as being a sign that it wasn't God's timing yet, as if doing God's will should be easy.
 - iii. Nonetheless, they did find time and means to build comfortable and even beautiful homes, but there had been an economic downturn and things were getting hard. Not only was production and income down, but what they had was disappearing all too quickly. So they just had to work harder to make up for the lack, but of course they were still able to buy the nice things of life. Excuses like, *"we deserve..."*, *"why shouldn't I have..."* or even *"I'm so deep in, what's a little more so I can have..."* Those who put their prosperity first are blind to God's chastening hand. The Jews were working hard, but no matter it all seemed to just disappear. Of course God will understand, and so their giving and their fervor slowed to a stop. BUT what they didn't see is that God caused this "downturn" to get their attention.

- iv. Therefore, God calls them to *“consider their ways.”* (cf. Hag. 1:5,7) We must make a practice of constant self-evaluation, are we where God wants us to be? Are we doing what God wants us to do? How are you spending your time, your money? What are your goals? What do you think about? Who are your heroes or your friends? We must be deliberate in our affections and actions to put God’s house first.
- v. This putting God first has two elements:
 1. Our spiritual life – so many Christians start well with the atonement of their sins, but slow down in their sanctified lifestyle. We become Gnostic, forgetting that all time and all activity is sacred not just Sundays. What happened to the fervor, where’s the passion, that we began with? Lust takes and burns itself out quickly, Passion builds and burns deliberately.
 2. Our Kingdom life – our priorities get messed up and we continue to live with worldly affections and appetites, despite the fact that we are a new creation. Jesus in John 6:27 says, *“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”* This pertains to the local church as well as the larger Kingdom work among the nations. We ought to be living on a war-time economy similar to how our parents lived during WW2 for example.
- vi. Blessings come through obedience to God, and that doesn’t always mean more wealth! God expects a lifestyle of obedience not a one-off choice. Mt. 6:33 encourages us to, *“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”* Therefore, *“Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified,” says the LORD.* Hag. 1:8
- vii. We read in Ezra and Haggai that after the word was given the leaders and the people rose up and work began again. Within 23 days (*compare vv. 1 and 15*) the people had re-organized themselves, changed their priorities and got to work.
- b. Haggai 2:1-9 (around Oct. 17, 520BC) – *“The Discouragement of the People”*
 - i. A month later the people have grown discouraged. Again we see that the excitement wore off and the realization of just how big a work they’ve gotten themselves into.
 - ii. We know from Ez. 5:3 that once construction began again so did the opposition. The enemy notices our efforts and recognizes the danger, consequently he acts; *“Satan does not waste his ammunition.”* So the renewed opposition begins to discourage them again. A kind of pessimism sets in, *“we tried that before and look where it got us.”*
 - iii. Also we read that the people were comparing this new Temple with the old one. We see this often today as people compare past church experiences or current teachers with where they are at today. *“In my other church...”* or *“have you listened to...”* These comparisons set up faulty expectations that set the stage for discouragement.
 - iv. And a wrong view of success discourages. True that this Second Temple was not as beautiful as the First Temple, but *“the glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,” says the LORD of hosts. ‘And in this place I will give peace,’ says the LORD of hosts.”* Hag. 2:8 It may sound simplistic, but we must remember the eternal significance of what we’re doing. This Second Temple is the one where Jesus would be dedicated, where He would walk, where He would reveal Himself, where the nations would come after the out pouring the Holy Spirit seeking to know true peace. Learn to see beyond the immediate into the eternal.

- v. Therefore, *“be strong... be strong... be strong!” Hag. 2:4* We must learn perseverance and endurance. One study shows that 70% of “Pastors” constantly fight depression and that 84% feel unqualified and discouraged in their ministry! There’s a reason God specifically spoke encouragement to Zerubbabel. God’s encouragement to persevere is accompanied by three things:
 - 1. His presence – *Hag. 2:4b, “...for I am with you,’ says the LORD of hosts.” (cf. Mt. 28:20) Jn. 14:16-18, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”*
 - 2. His promises – *Hag. 2:5, “According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!” (cf. Jn. 14:16-18, Mt. 18:20,)*
 - 3. His prophecies – *Hag. 2:6-9, “Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,’ says the LORD of hosts...”*
- c. Haggai 2:10-19 (around Dec. 18, 520BC) – *“The Dissatisfaction of the People, and of God”*
 - i. This message comes 3 months after the first message. The text suggests that perhaps the people were concerned about the upcoming harvest, the seed would have been in the ground and they were growing anxious.
 - ii. God through Haggai poses a series of questions of the priests and people to reveal the heart of the people. Perhaps the people looked at the Temple as a good luck charm that would assure blessings upon the people.
 - iii. God highlights that corruption taints everything. Jesus warned the disciples of the leaven of the Pharisees (rules v relationship), we can’t just go through the motions and expect that God must now bless us. The focus is the heart, if that is not pure then we defile the work. *Ps. 24:3-5, “Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.”*
 - iv. The greatest endeavor on earth is building of the Church. (cf. *Mt. 16:18, Eph. 2:21-22*) We must be holy inside, not just outside, despite the fact that we often see the outside (and judge) and not the inside. (cf. *2 Cor. 10:5, Mt. 5:27-30*) Not putting God first results in discipline, putting God first results in blessing. Seeking God's pleasure, as opposed to His gifts, should be first on our list. *Lev. 26* spells out God's blessings (5 will put to chase 100, 100 would put to chase 10,000 - note that there is still opposition but that with God it is as nothing.) There will be hunger but with God's pleasure 2 fish and 5 loaves is more than enough for Him to feed thousands. There is no other formula to success than obeying God, honoring His word, depending on Him in prayer and preaching the Gospel.
 - v. True blessing doesn't mean that He removes the problems, but that He is present in the problems. John Calvin commented on *Hag. 2:15-19*, saying, *"It often happens that those who sincerely and from the heart serve God, are deprived of earthly blessings, because God intends to elevate their minds to the hope of eternal reward."*
- d. Haggai 2:20-23 (around Dec. 18, 520BC) – *“The Discouragement of the Leaders”*
 - i. God knows what He is doing and will prevail. *Is. 14:24, "The LORD of hosts has sworn, saying, "Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, and as I have purposed, so it shall stand..." Is. 46:8-11, ""Remember this, and show yourselves men; recall to mind, O you transgressors. Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My*

pleasure,' calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it."

- ii. Zerubbabel serves as a type of Christ to prepare us for Jesus. Zerubbabel led the Jews out of Babylon (*i.e. bondage*), built the Temple, and becomes God's signet ring.
- iii. God promises to Zerubbabel that he will be God's signet ring. It is interesting to compare Hag. 2:23 and Jer. 22:24 and see how God works another element of restoration into the picture. Jehoiachin is removed as God's signet ring, years later Zerubbabel, J's grandson, is reinstituted as God's signet ring. Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon, blinded and imprisoned for 37 years and then released and sat at Neb's table. J's uncle, Zed. Took was placed in office by Neb and then rebelled being the last king of Israel.

3. Today

- a. Personal application. Heard the gospel, received Christ, then became disinterested or discouraged in spiritual growth and set it aside. Going through the religious motions, but without fervent life.
- b. Our culture. The twin idols of Gnosticism and Pragmatism.
- c. Our Church. Further up and further in. Fervor and zeal; moving outward. Everyone has a role in building the Church and we are currently at an amazing place where we are laying foundations within the community and defining who we are in the Body. There is no other work more important than this, it is worthy of every sacrifice, of every effort, of every ounce of strength that His name would be lifted up and people delivered. We must be holy, we must consider our own personal lives recognizing that our personal sin defiles the work of the Lord. Take heed!
- d. 4th Sunday of Advent – God's love for all men. Today we are called to work on another Temple, a mobile Temple that permits us to carry God to all men everywhere. We are called to be holy at all times, not just on Sunday mornings, and to bring people in contact with the Living God. From Magi to Shepherds, God is for all men. Magi (plural of *margus* a member of a hereditary priestly class among the ancient Medes and Persians)
- e. These books are a message of restoration. We see Israel restored after its idolatrous ways prior to the exile, and even Zerubbabel regaining what was lost by his grandfather.
- f. God's timing is not our timing; most of the prophecies aren't fulfilled until over 400 years later in Jesus. 2 Pet. 3:8-9, "*But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*"