

BIBLE SURVEY – HAGGAI

"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." Haggai 2:7

Who was Haggai?

Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi are the last of the prophetic books. They are the post-exilic prophets. Of the sixteen OT prophets, eleven prophesied before the Exile, two prophesied during the exile and three prophesied after the Exile. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi ministered in the same time period as Ezra, Nehemiah and Queen Esther. Haggai is the first prophetic voice to be heard after the Exile to Babylon. The name Haggai means *"festal one"*. It is suggested that Haggai was born on a feast day. As Haggai referred to the glory of the first Temple (2:3), he may have been alive to see the first Temple before it was destroyed. In that case he would be an old man in his eighties.

Historic Background

The Persian king, Cyrus, conquered Babylon in 538BC. He permitted the displaced peoples to return to their homelands, provided that they build a temple in which they would pray to their God on his behalf. 50 000 Judean exiles responded and seized this opportunity to return to Judea. As they retraced the route that would have been followed by their father Abraham, they were led by Zerubbabel (*seed of Babylon*) and Joshua, the High Priest. Zerubbabel had been born in exile and had never seen the Promised Land. He was a surviving member of the royal line of king David. Zerubbabel was the grandson to the last king of Judah, Jehoiachin. The name Joshua means *"God our Saviour"*. Zerubbabel became governor in Judea and Joshua became the High Priest.

Erecting an Altar

After retracing the route that Abraham took from his home town, Ur, up the river from Babylon, their first action on **returning** to the Promised Land was to raise an altar and give a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God. Most of the Judean exiles chose to remain in Babylon where many had prospered as merchants and moneychangers.

Overwhelming Obstacles

The exiles who returned to the land faced a hard struggle. The land had not been cultivated for 70 years. Jerusalem was a city in ruins, with no walls of protection. The task before them of **re-cultivating** the land, **rebuilding** their homes and **restoring** the Temple was daunting. There were so few of them and they had little in the way of resources. They also faced opposition from the Samaritans and Edomites. When Cyrus died and king Darius replaced him they lost the subsidy that Cyrus had been providing to re-build the Temple. Darius redirected the funds that had been given to returning peoples to build temples to help finance his military campaigns.

Discouraged

The immensity of the task before the returned exiles overwhelmed them and, discouraged, their hearts sank. After two years of building they stopped and for fifteen years there was no further progress on the building of the Temple. The foundations and beginnings of some low walls were a constant reminder of the project that had been begun but not continued.

Failure

The economy in Judah suffered severe recessions. Food became scarce and very expensive. Inflation spiralled. Droughts and disease reduced their herds and crops. Their savings evaporated. Having returned from exile in Babylon with high hopes of rebuilding their nation, they

floundered and struggled to survive. With the work on the Temple lying unfinished for 15 years, each person became involved in just building his own home.

Ezra testifies of the Success of Haggai

Ezra speaks of the prophet Haggai: *"The prophet Haggai and Zechariah, the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah in Jerusalem, in the Name of the God of Israel, who was over them. So Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, rose up and began to build the House of God, which was in Jerusalem ; and the prophets of God were with them, helping."* Ezra 5:1-2

Repent Rebuild Reform

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah were commissioned by the Lord to command the people to **repent**, to **rebuild** the Temple, and to **reform** their lives. In five messages from the Lord, Haggai exhorted the people to **return** to the Lord, to **repent** of their sins, to **renew** their efforts to **rebuild** the House of the Lord. He commanded them to **reform** their lives and **restructure** their priorities in the light of eternity.

Everything has Consequences

The droughts, crop failures and economic hardships being suffered by the people of Judah were a direct result of their misplaced priorities. National adversity is due to national disobedience to God. God's blessings are conditional requiring our obedience and faithfulness. God's purposes are achieved through His Word. Honour God and He will bless you.

Delayed Obedience is Disobedience

"Thus speaks The Lord of Hosts, saying: 'This people says, 'The time has not come, the time that the Lord's House should be built.' Then the Word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 'Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your panelled houses, and this Temple to lie in ruins?' Now therefore, thus says The Lord of Hosts: 'Consider your ways! 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 to put into a bag with holes.' Thus says The Lord of Hosts: 'Consider your ways!'"

Haggai 1:2-7

Do Not Settle for Less than God's Best

God's people were satisfied with mediocrity. They were guilty of misplaced priorities. They had enough time to build nice houses for themselves and even to panel them at a time when wood was scarce and expensive. But while their houses were being decorated, God's House was devastated.

Evaluate Your Sacrifices

The people claimed that it was not the right time to build the Temple. We can either make a plan or we can make an excuse. We make time for that which we think is most important. The best indicator of our priorities is what we spend our time, talents and treasure on. True love is measured by sacrifice. We can see how important something is by how much time, energy, effort and investment we place into it.

Reflect and Reconsider

The prophet Haggai calls for a thoughtful response. A spiritual response. A practical response. **"Consider your ways!"**

Making Excuses for Failure

The people had made excuses for their inactivity. Times were hard. The economy was bad. Their crops had failed. The economy was depressed. They barely had enough to eat. They did

not have enough to drink. They had inadequate clothing. Their wages seemed to dwindle as though their money bag had holes.

The Disastrous Results of Disobedience

The Word of the Lord comes by Haggai: *"You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says The Lord of Hosts. Because of My House that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labour of your hands."* Haggai 1:9-11

Disobedience Leads to Adversity

The catastrophic economic afflictions which the people were suffering were no excuse for their inactivity in God's service. Disobedience to God's Word was the cause of their afflictions. What you sow is what you reap. Disobedience leads to adversity. **Delayed obedience is disobedience.** The failure of God's people to put first things first had led to the disastrous situation they now found themselves in.

Seek First the Kingdom of God

In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord Jesus Christ taught: *"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. **Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?** Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 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.**"* Matthew 6:25-33

First Things First

You will never lose out by putting God first. Duty first. First restore the altar of your devotional life. Put first things first. Faithfulness to God is our highest priority. Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these other things will be added unto you. **What is your highest priority?** What are you devoting most of your **time** to? What are you investing most of your **talents** into? Are you laying up **treasures** in Heaven? Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Ultimate Priorities

Our priorities should be God's House, God's people, God's Creation, God's work, God's Kingdom. The Great Commission is our supreme ambition. Christ's last command must be our first concern.

Abundant Life

Life is not only about staying alive and making a living, but about living right and living for God. Jesus is the Life. He gives His people spiritual life now, eternal life then, abundant life always.

Inspire to Action

Haggai seeks to **inform**, **inspire** and **involve** the people in this great **privilege** and **priority** of rebuilding the Temple. He **motivates** them and he **mobilises** them to action. He **educates** them as to what is most important and he **enlists** them in God's service.

Indifference and Apathy are a Curse

"Shall your brethren go to war while you sit here?"

Numbers 32:6

"How long will you neglect to go and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers has given you?"

Joshua 18:3

"Curse Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse its inhabitants bitterly. Because they did not come to the help of the Lord. To the help of the Lord against the mighty."

Judges 5:23

"Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord deceitfully. And cursed is he who keeps back his sword from blood."

Jeremiah 48:10

"The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest."

Luke 10:2

"But everyone who hears these sayings of mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand."

Matthew 7:26

"And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself to do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes."

Luke 12:47

"Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin."

James 4:17

Drought and Famine are a Judgement on Laziness and Selfishness

"Therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need in everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you."

Deuteronomy 28:48

"So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, and your need like an armed man."

Proverbs 6:11

"The Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish, but He casts away the desire of the wicked."

Proverbs 10:3

"The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich."

Proverbs 13:4

"Laziness casts one into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger."

Proverbs 19:15

"The lazy man will not plough because of winter; he will beg during harvest and have nothing."

Proverbs 20:4

"A man with an evil eye hastens after riches, and does not consider that poverty will come upon him."

Proverbs 28:22

"Behold, therefore, I stretched out My hand against you, diminished your allotment, and gave you up to the will of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lawless behaviour."

Ezekiel 16:27

A Faithful Response

Haggai's warnings and rebuke against selfishness, laziness, apathy and inactivity had a powerful impact. *"Then 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 feared the presence of the Lord." Haggai 1:12

The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Zerubbabel, the descendant of David, and Joshua the High Priest, with all the remnant of God's people, obeyed the Word of God. They feared God and they sprang into action to carry out His commands. Repentance is shown by decisive actions of obedience. *"You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him."*

Deuteronomy 13:4

*"Do not be wise in your own eyes; **fear the Lord and depart from evil.**"*

Proverbs 3:7

"Fear God and keep His Commandments. For this is man's all."

Ecclesiastes 12:13

Our Lord Jesus Christ taught: *"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul, but rather **fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.**"* Matthew 10:28

"The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy."

Psalms 147:11

"And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation."

Luke 1:50

"But in every nation, whoever fears Him and works for righteousness is accepted by Him."

Acts 10:35

Discouragement and Depression

As the people began building, a discouragement seized them. The older people, remembering the splendour of the Temple of Solomon, were greatly disappointed. The new Temple did not measure up in any way. The foundation was much smaller in extent. It was inferior in size. The stones were not to be compared with the costliness of those which Solomon had laid. Their resources were so limited compared to what Solomon had mobilised. This second Temple would not have any of the magnificent items that made the first Temple so glorious. They did not have the Ark of the Covenant, or many of the other great furnishings which had been carried off as plunder by the Babylonians in 586BC. Pessimists dampened the enthusiasm of the builders.

The Glory of the Latter Temple Shall be Greater than the Former

*"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: 'Who is left among you who saw this Temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing? Yet now **be strong, Zerubbabel,**' says the Lord; 'and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the High Priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,' says the Lord, '**and work; for I am with you,**' says The Lord of Hosts. According to the Word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; **do not fear!**' For thus says The Lord of Hosts: '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. 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says The Lord of Hosts. '**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."*

Haggai 2:2-9

A Message of Encouragement

The glory of this second Temple would be far greater than that of the former. Solomon may have been a great king, but a greater than Solomon is coming. Into this Temple that they were

privileged to be building, The Desire of the Nations, the Son of God, the Messiah, will come. The Prince of Peace will stand and teach in this place.

Focus on the Glorious Future

Focus on the future. Better to begin small than not at all. God encourages the political and religious leaders and the people to: **be strong and work. Do not fear.** I will fill this Temple with glory. The glory of this latter Temple shall be greater than the former. The Messiah shall come to this Temple.

Change Your Way of Thinking

Haggai challenges the people to revise their way of thinking. To recognise that it was when they stopped putting God and His House first, that things began to go wrong with them. God was actually causing the disasters that they were suffering from. Everything has consequences.

Change Your Priorities in the Light of Eternity

Haggai challenged the people to revise their priorities in the light of eternity. To compare how much they had poured into their own homes and how little they had invested into God's House. Today we could challenge people to consider how much money they invest in their cell phones, air time, Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonalds, Coca Colas and other luxuries compared to how much they invest in Christian ministries and missions?

Time Talents and Treasure

How much time do you spend watching TV? Compared to how much time do you spend studying the Word of God? How much time do you spend reading newspapers and secular magazines versus how much time do you spend studying Christian books and Christian publications? How much time do you spend on secular websites and secular music versus Christian music, Christian websites and Christian social media? What are you investing your **time, talents** and **treasure** into? Restore your devotional life. Put first things first. Seek first the Kingdom of God.

Building Begins

The people responded positively and returned to the task of rebuilding the Temple. In just three and a half weeks the builders had organised and found sufficient material to begin rebuilding.

Do Not Despise the Day of Small Beginnings

The second message came twenty seven days after they had begun building. With morale declining as some pessimists made negative comparisons with Solomon's Temple, the Word of the Lord called on the people to focus on the future and not to be depressed by humble beginnings. Though starting small, this Temple has a more glorious future. In it The Desire of the Nations, the Messiah, the Son of God, shall come and His glory shall outshine the Temple.

Defilement and Consecration

Haggai then focussed on issues of consecration and defilement. *"Thus says The Lord of Hosts: 'Now, ask the priests concerning the Law, saying, 'If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?' Then the priests answered and said, 'No.' And Haggai said, 'If one who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean?' So the priests answered and said, it shall be unclean.' Then Haggai answered and said, 'So is this people, and so is this nation before Me,' says the Lord, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.'"*

Haggai 2:11-14

Beware of Defilement

If you put clean things with the dirty, do the clean things make the dirty clean? The priests replied that what is dirty will defile the clean. So Haggai asked: If something is consecrated to the Lord and you put it with something defiled does the consecration pass over from the consecrated to the defiled? And the answer was **'No'**.

You Must Be Sanctified

The people had the privilege to build the consecrated Temple and they needed to be consecrated as they were completing this work. Defiled people can make a consecrated Temple defiled in God's sight. We are not made clean before God because of good works that we may do. In fact, we can actually contaminate the work of God if we do not put our lives right first. By use of these questions and answers, the prophet Haggai showed the people where they failed and fell short. The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The Law of the Lord is the schoolmaster that leads us to Christ that we may be justified by faith.

Why Are Our Prayers Not Answered?

By helping the people realise their sinfulness Haggai showed them why their prayers were not being answered. They had procrastinated so long on completing the Temple. They had failed to put the Kingdom of God first. And now they were spoiling much of the work that they were doing because they had not repented of their sins and made right before God. The land had suffered from their neglect. The nation had come under a curse because of idolatry and immorality. Their economy was depressed because their devotion and worship with God was neglected.

Consecrated work requires consecrated workers.

From this Day I Will Bless You

*"And now, carefully consider from this day forward: from before stone was laid upon stone in The Temple of the Lord – since those days, when one came to a heap of twenty ephahs, there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty baths from the press, there were but twenty. I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labours of your hands; yet you did not turn to Me," says the Lord. Consider now from this day forward... from the day that the foundation of The Lord's Temple was laid – consider it: Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded fruit. **But from this day I will bless you.**"*

Haggai 2:15-19

Ezra Records the Results

"So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. Now the Temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this House of God with joy. And they offered sacrifices..." Ezra 6:14-17. The next day the people were blessed with rain, and the drought was broken.

God Will Shake the Heavens and the Earth

"Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying: 'I will shake heaven and earth. I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I will destroy the strength of the Gentile kingdoms. I will overthrow the chariots and those who ride in them; The horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother. 'In that day,' says The Lord of Hosts, 'I will take you, Zerubbabel My servant, the son of Shealtiel,' says the Lord, 'and will make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you,' says The Lord of Hosts."

Haggai 2:21-23

Fulfilment in the New Testament

God oversees history. All other thrones will be overthrown. *"Tremble before Him, all the earth. The earth also was firmly established. It shall not be moved."* 1 Chronicles 16:30. But the throne of David will be occupied with the Prince of Peace. Zerubbabel is identified in the Gospels as David's descendant and in the line of the Messiah. Matthew 1:12 lists Zerubbabel in the line of Joseph, the step-father of Jesus and Luke 3:27 identifies Zerubbabel in the line of His mother Mary. Hebrews 12:26-29 quotes from this passage in Haggai: "... whose Voice then shook the

earth; but now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven. Now this, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. **Therefore, since we are receiving a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.**" Hebrews 12:26-29

The Signet Ring

The signet ring (Haggai 2:23) refers to the engraved stone set in gold which, when pressed on wax or soft clay, left an impression of the personal ensign of the bearer. The signet ring represented the authority of the bearer, normally a king. To affix a seal, or to fasten by sealing with the impression of a signet, confirmed and formalised treaties, covenants, and laws. God was restoring the royal line of David through Zerubbabel who would have the privilege of being in the line of the Messiah Himself, the Son of David, the Prince of Peace, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Restorer of the heritage of God's people. Christ will be the new Temple which can never be destroyed. And those who attempted to tear Him down found that in three days He rose from the dead. Jesus Christ is the Resurrection and the Life, no-one comes to the Father except through Him. He has risen! Alive forevermore! He is reigning on high and He will come to judge the living and the dead.

The Statue and the Stone

"A Stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces... and the Stone became a mountain and filled the whole earth... and it shall stand forever." Daniel 2:28-44. The Lord Jesus Christ declared: **"The Stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone."** Luke 20:17-18. In Lubyanka Square, in Moscow, about 900 meters north-east of Red Square, a huge statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the Cheka, which later became the KGB, was erected in 1958. The statue was directly in front of the Lubyanka, the notorious headquarters of the KGB, wherein many Christians were interrogated, tortured and murdered. In 1991, the statue of Dzerzhinsky was toppled and removed and a simple stone of Solovki Monastery from Solovetski Island, the prototype concentration camp of the Soviet Union, was placed in the square where the statue of Dzerzhinsky had once stood. The symbolism of the victory of Christ over atheistic communism is striking. **"And whoever falls on that Stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."** Matthew 21:44

God Will Crush His Enemies

Those who declare war on God will lose. God is all-knowing, everywhere present and all-powerful. God is eternal. He is infinite. No-one can resist His Will. God warns that He will overthrow those kingdoms that are in resistance to Him. He will overthrow their armies. He will judge the nations. Haggai refers to God as The Lord of Hosts. This is a Name which describes the greatness of God. He is more powerful than any earthly nation. And richer than every kingdom on earth combined. God demands that His people give Him **priority**. He demands **purity** from His people. Consecrated work needs consecrated workers. *"And what agreement has the Temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of The Living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.'" 2 Corinthians 6:16-17*

Ultimate Priorities

God is in control of all things, including economic conditions. Poor harvests are not caused by accidents of nature, or by blind fate, but by the Living God who communicates through hardships and afflictions to teach important spiritual measures. There can be no half measures in the service of God. We have to put His eternal interests before our own temporal concerns. We cannot make excuses for delaying to obey the Word of God and to fulfil His Work. We need to review our lives to see how God may be speaking to us. We need to prove our repentance by our

actions. Even though nations are going to be in turmoil, God who governs the affairs of nations never forgets the individual. The Church of Christ is greater than the Temples built by Solomon and Zerubbabel. ***"Do you not know that **you are the temple of God** and that **the Spirit of God dwells in you?** If anyone defiles the Temple of God, God will destroy him. For the Temple of God is holy, which temple you are."*** 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Christ is the Chief Cornerstone

"Now, therefore, **you are** no longer strangers and foreigners, but **fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone**, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

Ephesians 2:19-22

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