

Haggai's Second Sermon to Judah

Haggai 2:1-9

Haggai 2:1-9 – *"In the seventh month, on the twenty-first of the 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? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing?'⁴ 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.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!'"*

⁶*"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,'⁷ 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.⁸ 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the Lord of hosts.⁹ '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."*

Background Notes

The theme of the book of Haggai is "Rebuilding the Temple." In 586BC, God allowed the Babylonian armies, under Nebuchadnezzar, to conquer the kingdom of Judah. At that time the beautiful Temple of the Lord, built by King Solomon, was destroyed, and the people of Judah were carried away into captivity in Babylon. When the Babylonians were, in turn, conquered the Persians, King Cyrus of Persia allowed the Jews to return to their homeland. Cyrus even gave them permission to rebuild the Temple.

Why would Cyrus, a pagan king, issue a decree allowing Jewish captives in Babylon to return home to Jerusalem? Two reasons can be given.

1. From Cyrus' perspective: Cyrus wanted to appease all the gods.

Cyrus, the pagan, was a polytheist, or more precisely a *henotheist*. Cyrus not only believed in many gods, but he also believed that every nation had its own god or set of gods. In his edict, he decreed that all his captives from foreign nations could return to their homelands and rebuild the temples of their gods. Cyrus wanted to win the favor of all the gods. Little did Cyrus know that the one true God was overruling all of these events so that His people could return to the land of Israel!

2. From God's perspective: Cyrus was a mere tool in God's hands to accomplish His sovereign purposes.

Isaiah wrote the following prophecy about Cyrus about 200 years before this time: *"The Lord who says of Cyrus, He is my shepherd and he shall perform all my pleasures, saying to Jerusalem, 'You shall be built,' and to the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid'"* (Isaiah 44:28). Isaiah referred to Cyrus as "God's shepherd" - not because he was a believer, but because God was using him to direct the Jews back to Israel. Why? Because this was where God wanted them. What a lesson for us! God can use even pagan people to accomplish His purposes in the lives of His people.

The Jews started to rebuild the Temple when they returned to Jerusalem, but they became discouraged and stopped building for about 15 to 16 years. Their priorities changed. They began to beautify their own homes while the house of the Lord lay in ruins.

At this point God raised up the prophet Haggai to preach a series of four motivational sermons, encouraging the people to get their priorities straightened out and once again start rebuilding the Temple. Haggai 2:1-9 was Haggai's second sermon to motivate the people to get on with the job of rebuilding the Temple.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. The presence of the Lord is more important than the glory of the place.

"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? ⁴ 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. 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!" (v3-5).

Some of the Jews who were involved in rebuilding the Temple had seen Solomon's glorious Temple before it was destroyed. In fact, Haggai himself may have seen Solomon's Temple as a young boy. In any case, some of the older generation had seen the grandeur of Solomon's Temple, and the Temple that was under construction was nothing by comparison. As a result, some of the people were discouraged. So Haggai gave this second sermon to encourage the people. *"Work; for I am with you,' says the Lord of hosts"* (v4).

"Don't be discouraged," Haggai said. "It's not the grandeur of the building that's important. ***It's the presence of the Lord that's most important!*** If the Lord is not in it, who cares how big the place it is or how great it looks? On the other hand, if the Lord is present and He approves of the activity, that's what counts. That's what is important."

The prophet Zechariah ministered to the people at the same time as Haggai. He also encouraged the people to realize that the size and glory of the building was not what mattered. *"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this*

temple. His hands shall also finish it. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. For who has despised the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4:9-10).

In essence, Zechariah said to the people: "Stop talking about the good old days! Yes, this rebuilt Temple of Zerubbabel is much smaller than Solomon's Temple, and it doesn't have the glory and grandeur of Solomon's Temple. But so what? Don't despise the day of "small things." The Lord is with you – and the presence of the Lord is more important than the glory of the place!"

How often we get discouraged because we think our ministry or our contribution to the Lord is small and insignificant, especially when compared to the glory and grandeur of other ministries. We may sometimes be tempted to wonder, "Why can't our church be bigger and better than those mega churches that we see and hear about?" Listen - the presence and approval of the Lord is what really counts!

So if you're discouraged because you hoped your church or your ministry would be "bigger and better" - well, hear the word of the Lord from Haggai! If your heart is right, and you're not seeking your own glory, if you're walking with the Lord and following His guidance in your unique role and contribution to the kingdom - this pleases the Lord. That's what the Lord is looking for! The presence of the Lord is more important than the glory of the place.

2. The coming of the Lord will bring greater glory and peace.

"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;'⁷ 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. ⁸ 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the Lord of hosts. ⁹ '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" (v6-9).

There are two key questions in reference to these verses.

1. Who or what is the "desire of all nations"?

Notice that some translations use a capital "D" for "Desire of All Nations" while others have lower case "desire of all nations" – and still others have "wealth of all nations." The Hebrew word used here can refer to a person or to things. If a person is in view, then it obviously refers to the coming Messiah, and should be capital "D." If things are in view, then it refers to the precious things or wealth that the nations will bring to the Temple at the time of the Messiah's future reign. In either case, these verses have Messianic significance. That brings us to our second question.

2. When will the prophecy be fulfilled?

Does it refer to the first coming of the Messiah or to the second coming of the Messiah? A case can be built for each view! From God's perspective, both comings could be said to be "in a little while" (v6). Hebrews 1:1 says that the "last days" extend from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ.

The first advent of our Lord certainly affected all nations with the worldwide gospel. And the glory of the Lord Jesus was certainly greater than the glory of any former Temple! However, in view of the close connection and parallel of this passage with Zechariah 14 (which clearly refers to the second coming of Christ), and the fact that this prophecy is quoted in Hebrews 12 as still future, I'm inclined to believe that Haggai spoke primarily and ultimately to the second coming of Christ. Only then will this prophecy be completely fulfilled.

At that time, there will be cosmic and global disturbances (Matthew 24), the Battle of Armageddon will take place (Revelation 16), and our Lord will judge the nations (Matthew 25). Then the Lord will set up His glorious millennial kingdom - including the millennial Temple (Ezekiel 40-48). Then there will be universal peace. It seems that the extent of this prophecy may even carry on to the setting up of the New Heaven and the New Earth in the eternal state. The coming of the Lord will bring greater glory and peace!

Practical Application

Remember, God has unlimited resources.

"The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine," says the Lord of hosts (v8). In other words, "All the money is Mine!" says the Lord. Why did the Lord say that? We all know that God owns everything - right? Well, remember that the people were discouraged at this time. They were too poor to build a costly Temple, like the Solomon's beautiful Temple. But God said that the cost of the Temple is not what counts. The heart of the people is what counts! God even allowed Solomon's glorious Temple to be destroyed because the hearts of the people had turned away from Him.

If God wanted a costly Temple, He could have one, because He has unlimited resources. He owns all the silver and the gold! So if the Lord calls you to a ministry, or to foreign missions, or some other area of service, don't sweat the finances. The Lord owns all the silver and the gold! In Psalm 50:12, God said: *"The world is Mine and all it contains."*

Here's an example. Margie and I are constantly amazed at how God provides for Growing Christians Ministries. We never ask for donations, but after twenty-seven years [in 1999] we have never been "in the red." We try our best to be frugal, and use common sense, and not run ahead of God's guidance. But as we walk by faith and step out in faith in this ministry, we remember that **God has unlimited resources!**