

Haggai's Third Sermon to Judah

Haggai 2:10-19

Haggai 2:10-13 – *“On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, “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.”*

Background Notes

In this section of the chapter we have Haggai's third sermon to the people of Judah. It is a further promise that God will bless them because their priorities straightened out, and they are once again rebuilding the Temple.

The prophet Jeremiah predicted that the Jews would spend 70 years as captives in Babylon for their sins against the Lord. *“The Lord has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear. They said, ‘Repent now every one of his evil way and his evil doings, and dwell in the land that the Lord has given to you and your fathers forever and ever. Do not go after other gods to serve them and worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands; and I will not harm you. Yet you have not listened to Me,’ says the Lord, ‘that you might provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt.’ Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Because you have not heard My words, I will send and take all the families of the north,’ says the Lord, ‘and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations. Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years” (Jeremiah 25:4-11).*

Then Jeremiah predicted that the people would return to the land of Judah after the 70-year captivity. *“For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place” (Jeremiah 29:10).* So in the book of Haggai the people have returned from the 70-year captivity and they're rebuilding the Temple.

But how do you calculate the 70 years? There are two ways. You can figure the 70 years from 605BC, when Daniel and others were taken to Babylon, until about 535BC, the year that the rebuilding of the Temple began. That gives 70 years. Or you can date from 586BC, when Solomon's Temple was destroyed, down to 516 BC, when the rebuilt Temple was completed. That's also 70 years.

Either way is acceptable for calculating the 70 years of exile. After their return, it took about 20 years to complete the rebuilding of the new Temple ("Zerubbabel's Temple"). The returning captives laid the Temple foundation soon after they returned, but they stopped building for about 15-16 years because of fear, discouragement, and reversed priorities.

Finally they started rebuilding again in 520BC, because of the motivating prophetic ministries of Haggai and Zechariah. They finished the job four years later in 516BC. The prophet Haggai gave four sermons in a four -month period to stir up the people – a challenge to them to rebuild.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. There is a significant difference between sanctification and defilement.

"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" (v12-13).

Were you confused as you read these verses? Don't feel bad! To appreciate what's going on here, you have to know the details of the Mosaic Laws about what was "clean" and what was "unclean." (Read Leviticus chapter 11 and 22, and Numbers 19.)

Here are two examples:

- Leviticus 11:31-32: *"Whoever touches them when they are dead shall be unclean until evening. Anything on which any of them falls, when they are dead shall be unclean, whether it is any item of wood or clothing or skin or sack, whatever item it is, in which any work is done, it must be put in water. And it shall be unclean until evening; then it shall be clean."*
- Numbers 19:22: *"Whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean; and the person who touches it shall be unclean until evening."*

Now back to Haggai 2. God's Law said that if something was clean, like the meat from a consecrated sacrifice, and it touched some other food, the cleanness was not transferred to the other food. It did not become sanctified (v12). The obvious answer from the Law was: **cleanness or holiness is not transferable.** On the other hand, the Law said if

someone was unclean because they touched a dead body, then whatever that person touched became unclean (v13). According to the Law, **uncleanness or defilement is transferable.**

This point could be illustrated by the old saying, “One rotten apple in a barrel of good apples affects all the apples.” Right? But it doesn’t work the other way around. One good apple doesn’t make rotten apples good! And one healthy person can’t transfer his health to a diseased person - but a diseased person can transfer his or her disease to a healthy person. The same is true in the moral area. There is a significant difference between sanctification and defilement. This was true under the Law, and it’s still true today. For example, the *sinful nature* is transferred from parents to children, but *salvation* cannot be transferred from parents to children. So there is a significant difference between sanctification and defilement.

2. There is a significant difference between worship and religion.

Haggai 2:14-19: *“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. ‘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 labors of your hands; yet you did not turn to Me,’ says the Lord.*

‘Consider now from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, 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.’”

In verses 10-13, why did Haggai draw the distinction between sanctification and defilement? What was he pointing out to the Jews who were rebuilding the Temple? His point was that even though they had been bringing sacrifices during the 15 years that the Temple was in ruins, it was not true worship. Their heart was not in it. They were just going through religious motions, and this was unacceptable. *“Every work of their hands and what they offer there is unclean” (v14).*

And that's why God didn't bless them! That's why their harvests were thin (v16). That's why their crops were struck with blight, mildew and hail (v17). That's why the barns were empty and the vines in the trees bore no fruit (v19). But now things would be different. Now God would bless them, because now the hearts of the people were right with the Lord. Now they were not just going through “religious motions” or “religious activity.” Now they were truly worshipping - and **their obedience to the Lord in rebuilding the Temple proved it.**

There is a significant difference between worship and religion. Are you involved in **true** worship of the Lord - or are you just going through the motions? Why do you go to church, for example? Do you go out of habit? Do you go because someone drags you there? Do you go to get rid of a guilty feeling? Do you go to put on a good show for someone else? I hope you go because you love the Lord, and because you are obeying Him, and you want to worship Him and learn from His Word - because there is a significant difference between true worship and mere "religious activity."

Practical Application

You don't have to wait for blessing!

When God said to the people, "*from this day forward I will bless you*" (v18-19), four years would go by before the rebuilt Temple would be completed. Four years! But God didn't plan to wait until the project was completed before He would bless them. They would be blessed **now**! Why? Because their hearts were **now** right with the Lord, their priorities were **now** straightened out, and **now** they were obeying Him. When your heart and your priorities are right with God, you don't have to wait for blessing!

Remember - David wanted to build the Temple for the Lord? But God said, "No, I want your son Solomon to build the Temple." But God blessed David for his heart attitude right then, just as if he had completed the project of building the Temple.

And the same is true today. When you're getting involved in doing something for the Lord, you don't have to wait for Him to bless you. God doesn't wait until the project is finished before He rewards you with spiritual blessing. Aren't you glad? Once your heart is obedient and your priorities are in line with the Word of God, you will be blessed. You don't have to wait for blessing!

For example, the joy of the Lord, the assurance of salvation, spiritual strength, and moral courage... these are all spiritual blessings, and they are all available to every Christian right **now**. You don't have to wait until you complete a certain number of years of Christian service, or some ministry project. It's not some kind of reward for having "put in your time" for God! These blessings are available **now**. But you won't be able to enjoy them if you're disobedient, and your heart is not right with the Lord, and your top priorities are centered on this temporary world, rather than centered on the will of God.

But if your heart is right with the Lord, and you get your priorities lined up with the Word of God and His will for you, you will be blessed - from this day forward!

You won't have to wait for blessing!