

Haggai 2.1-9 / FBC / 11.08.20

Introduction

- † **[1: Title]** Last week, we looked at the first prophecy in the book of Haggai. Rather than *foretelling* the future, that prophecy was *forthtelling*: that is, it called the people back into right covenant relationship with God.
- Today we will look at Haggai's second prophecy, one that not only *foretold* the future to the people of Haggai's day, but which foretells events that are still future in our day. Open your Bible if you will to Haggai 2. Don't be embarrassed if you need to use your table of contents.
- † Now think about the biblical prophets for a moment. How did this work? Did a fellow like Haggai come in and say he had a prophecy for every person in this room, and then go around claiming "George, I know you are a man, but you will be pregnant with child this time next year"; or "Bob, you could do cartwheels on your rooftop, if only you had faith enough"; is that how it worked? No.
- Was the prophecy a gift the prophet could turn on and off, so if I had the gift, I could give a prophecy whenever I wanted to whomever I wanted? No.
 - Was an Old Testament prophet speaking for God ever wrong in his prophecy? He better not be, because the penalty for that under the Mosaic Covenant was death!
 - The way prophecy worked was God spoke to a fellow, and thereby ruined his life; at least most of the time. Prophecy did not make you popular. Prophets were ridiculed, hunted, chased out of town, killed, and otherwise mistreated much of the time!
 - In any case, God spoke to the prophet and compelled him to share it with certain people. Sometimes God gave him words to say or something to do, sometimes he was given a vision, a partial view of what to expect in the future.
 - I keep referring to the prophet as masculine, but the word "prophetess" does occur multiple times in scripture to describe women through whom God worked.
- † **[2: Players]** The prophet Haggai was a man, and he gave this prophecy in 520BC, so about 2500 years ago. Before we examine the text, let's review the characters.
- The people of Haggai's community were the first returning exiles, who lived in Jerusalem.
 - Zerubbabel was the political overseer of the exiles, appointed by the Persian government. He also was a grandson of the Judean king who had surrendered to the Babylonians sixty-six years earlier, so he was the rightful king of all Israel at this time, and he would be an ancestor of Jesus.
 - Joshua was the legitimate high priest, descended from Aaron and the son of the high priest who had been exiled by the Babylonians.
 - Haggai was just a normal person like you or me, who found himself being used by God for something greater than he could have imagined. God spoke through Haggai and brought about great change in the people of this community, great improvement in their relationship with God.
 - Because of Haggai's first prophecy, the people began rebuilding the temple again, and would complete it four years later. They also repented to become more devoted to God, more dependent on God, and more obedient as they sought to live like God's chosen, holy, people.

- In our passage today, God will give them a glimpse of the future, a reason to hope that God would fully restore his blessing to Israel, that they would be his representative people on Earth as God had promised before. Let's pray and take a look at our text!

[3: 2.1-3] Haggai 2.1-3 ESV: In the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month [still in Persian King Darius's second year, as in the previous verse], **the word of the LORD [Yahweh] came by the hand of Haggai the prophet:** [God said:] **"Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people, and say, 'Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?'"**

† This message was delivered on the last ordinary day of the Feast of Booths or Feast of Tabernacles. The people would have been gathered at the temple mount for this week-long festival.

- They would have known from scripture that this was the same time of year as when Solomon originally dedicated the temple 440 years earlier [1 Kings 6.38; 8.2]. Now, one month after starting construction again, they apparently were discouraged – seeing their efforts as nothing compared to Solomon's temple – perhaps because the rebuilt temple would not be as glorious, perhaps because the current construction site was a mess.
- Meanwhile, this feast was a remembrance of God's provision and protection during the exodus and a celebration of the present blessing of the harvest. But as we learned in Haggai 1, they were suffering from a bad harvest, due to God's discipline for their sin. So their rejoicing was more subdued than usual.

† **[4: First Temple Exterior]** Ezra tells us that some of the elderly among the people had experienced the fall of Jerusalem and exile to Babylon, sixty-six years earlier. So those people could remember Solomon's temple. But how nice was it when they saw it before the exile?

- Solomon's temple itself was not huge. According to Ezra [6.3], the Persian king had decreed that the new temple would be twice as tall at ninety feet and three times as wide at ninety feet. Of course, what some distant bureaucrat decides is not always realistic to the people on site.
- Solomon's temple originally was ornate inside, but just before the exile it was not nearly as nice as it had been, because it had been plundered multiple times. It first was plundered by the Egyptians [~926BC], then by Judah's kings to pay for protection successively to the Arameans [~800BC], the Assyrians [~715BC], and the Assyrians again [701BC], then plundered by the Babylonians [597BC], before they destroyed the temple altogether in 586BC. All of the plundering probably happened before any of these people were old enough to observe anything about the temple. So it is hard to see how they would lament the lack of ornamentation.
- It is likely they lamented the loss of plundered sacred objects like the ark of covenant. According to Ezra [5.14; 6.5], the returning exiles brought back at least some of the gold and silver vessels the Babylonians had plundered, but perhaps this did not include sacred objects.
- Another thing weighing on them might have been the vision of the temple for the messianic age as prophesied by Isaiah and Ezekiel, how it would surpass the glory and beauty of the first temple; they knew they were not aspiring to anything that grand, which would be disheartening if they wanted to believe they were the faithful remnant awaiting the Messiah-savior.
- **[5: Nehemiah's Temple]** Also, the temple mount before the exile had been a complex, not just the temple itself but other buildings, walls, plus decorative carvings in the wood and rock. This

picture is a rendering from the north of when Nehemiah had led the people to restore the towers and walls, but that was seventy to eighty years after Haggai. Without the walls and towers, the rebuilt temple itself would be a simple building on the high platform.

- One other consideration is that the returned exiles probably remembered the temple as extraordinary, because it had been built up in their minds over the years of exile and return. Now they were struggling to get started rebuilding, so they were frustrated. More and more as I study this passage, I think the problem primarily was that at this point the temple mount was barren. God apparently sensed the discouragement among the people.

[6: 2.4-5] Haggai 2.4-5 ESV: [Haggai continued] **“Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the LORD. Work, for I am with you, declares the LORD of hosts, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not.”**

† We have here a logical chiasm; let’s take a look:

A. Command: Be strong and get to work!

B. Reassurance: I am with you and I am the Lord Almighty!

C. Theology: I made you a covenant promise in the Exodus.

B’ Reassurance: The Holy Spirit is still with you!

A’ Command: Do not fear!

† **[7: theology]** Let’s start with the theology. When the Hebrew people were rescued from Egypt through the exodus, God promised he would deliver them and provide for them, and that his Spirit was in their midst, so they were not to fear the Egyptians or hunger or anything else.

- Nine centuries later, Haggai’s community was celebrating a feast that remembered God’s provision during the exodus. It also celebrated God’s current provision in the harvest, and the weak harvest was a reminder of how much they depended on God’s covenant blessings.

† **[8: reassurance]** God’s reassurances encourage by reiterating his promise. The people might be intimidated by the task of building the temple and fearful about dealing with the bad harvest, but just as God had provided, protected, and empowered during the exodus, he would again.

- Their God is [יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת], which most English Bibles translate as “the LORD of hosts” or “the LORD Almighty.” [יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת] emphasizes Yahweh as the all-powerful God.
- This all-powerful God is with them, his Spirit remains among them! He is aware of their struggles, he is aware of their fears, he is aware of their sins, and he is right there with them! Would you find that reassuring?
- Scholar Richard Taylor wrote, “...the prophet indicates that the antidote to discouragement lies in reflection on the Lord’s continuous presence, as evidenced by his prior salvific deeds in behalf of his people.” In other words, when you are discouraged, remember who God is, what he has done for you, and what he has promised. Maybe this is a lesson we can take for ourselves.

† **[9: command]** Now let’s consider the commands. In the first prophecy, we saw the people in Haggai’s community had learned to fear God; now God commanded them not to fear the world, not to fear failure, for he was faithful and he was with them. The theological truth provides reassurance, which makes the commands possible to obey. This is how God communicates!

- This language of the commands would have reminded the people of the Exodus, when God said to Joshua [1.9 ESV], **“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”**
- It also would have reminded the people of David’s words to Solomon about the original construction of the temple: **1 Chronicles 28.20 NIV: “David also said to Solomon his son, ‘Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the LORD is finished.’”**

† As scholar Pieter Verhoef wrote, “The people who bow in awe before the Lord must not be afraid to serve the Lord.”

- God told the leaders and the people that they should take courage, be strong, take heart, for he was with them. And having taken heart, they should get back to work. They were to bravely press on with the work while trusting God to deliver success.
- **[10: motto]** The people were to do what God said, and trust God with the results and everything else. This is one of the keys to successful life! God gave Adam and Eve command and promise: they were to do what God said and trust God with the results and everything else. God gave Abraham command and promise: Abraham was to do what God said and trust God with the results and everything else. Under the Mosaic Law for Israel God gave them command and promise: they were to do what God said and trust God with the results and everything else.
- Nothing had changed for these former exiles, who still lived under the Mosaic Covenant; and, honestly, in this sense nothing has changed for us under the New Covenant: we should do what God says and trust him with the results and everything else!
- As God’s people, this postexilic community was not to allow their concerns to be more influential than God’s plans. We also should not allow our concerns, fears, anxieties to be more influential than God’s plans. God is all powerful, all capable, and if he wants us to do something, we should do it, trusting him to empower us and deliver us.
- And we should keep in mind that success in God’s eyes is not about accomplishment, it is about faithfulness and obedience. It was up to God whether the rebuilt temple was magnificent or not, the people’s responsibility was to act in faith and obedience by building it.
- So when you read in the Bible that God wants you to reproduce his image among lost people, when you sense the conviction that God wants you to restore a broken relationship, when you know God wants you to press on ministering though you are partially debilitated and chronically in pain... remember who God is, how powerful he is and what he has done for you and through you in the past, what he promises right now – that he is with you, empowering you – and that your job is not to worry about failure or human impossibilities, it is to do what God says and trust him with the results and everything else!

[11: 2.6-9] Let’s finish our text. **Haggai 2.6-9 ESV: “For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts.”**

- † God identifies himself five times as [יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת], the LORD of hosts or the LORD Almighty. God emphatically is reminding the people that he is all powerful, he is in control, he can make happen whatever he wants.
- † **[12: shake]** What God said here recalls God's intervention for his people in the past. For example, describing the exodus, **Psalm 68.8 NIV** says, **"the earth shook, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel."**
- And **Exodus 15.14 NIV** says, **"The nations will hear and tremble..."**
 - Now God said, "once more," so the people of Haggai's day would know there would be a new exodus-like deliverance in the future, as previous prophets had attested. God would shake the heavens and the Earth, the sea and the land, *nothing* would be unaffected. This would be a time of judgment, as God would shake the nations too: then Israel would be free, and the Gentiles would give their treasure to God.
- † **[13: treasure]** When God delivered the people out of Egypt, they carried Egyptian gold, silver, and gems, which they used on the tabernacle; and Solomon's first temple was largely furnished with tribute from the nations which had been taken by his father David [2 Samuel 8.7-12; 1 Kings 7.51].
- In the future deliverance, God again will adorn his temple with treasures taken from the nations. Isaiah prophesied that the nations who did not serve Israel under the Messiah-king would perish, while those who survived would bring their treasures to Jerusalem [60.4-14]. God says the gold and silver are his, and he will make the nations acknowledge this.
 - If you read the NKJV or NIV, you might get a different feel from v.7, because some translators have read the Hebrew to mean the nations will come to the temple to see the Messiah. I don't think that is what the Hebrew is saying, but either way, we see this as a vision of the end times.
- † The mention of peace and the surviving nations paying tribute to Israel tells us we are talking about the temple of the millennial kingdom when Christ returns.
- During the exile, the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel spoke of the coming Messiah who would be king and savior, and provided assurances of peace in his reign. After Haggai, the prophets Zechariah and Malachi would say the same.
 - As scholar Eugene Merrill said, "With his feet firmly planted in the world of the sixth century, B.C., Haggai lifted up his eyes and those of his people to the eschaton [the end times] as well – to the day when the Lord would fill His house with His glory and peace."
- † **[14: little]** What I want to know is, why has this not happened yet? I mean, how long is 'in a little while'? God did not deliver on this promise fully during the post-exilic era, nor in the New Testament era, nor even yet for the next two thousand years! What's up with that?
- It is possible we are translating "in a little while" incorrectly. The Hebrew phrase in this verse is unique in the Bible, so it is hard to be sure. The Greek Septuagint does not have a time element.
 - Another theory is that the immediacy was conditional, and since the post-exilic community failed to meet those conditions, and then the religious leaders of Jesus' day rejected him as the Messiah from God, therefore God pushed fulfillment into the more distant future.

- Or perhaps God's sense of timing simply is not the same as ours. Many of Jesus' and Paul's messages about the end times seem to imply the same immediacy, yet we still are waiting.

† **[15: peace]** In any case, when God does bring all this about, the rebuilt temple will have even greater glory than before, and there will be peace.

- In the prophets, God repeatedly promised peace to Jerusalem and to the temple on Mount Zion. This peace results from renewal of the covenant relationship between God and Israel as his representative people in Christ's millennial kingdom.
- The Hebrew word for peace [שָׁלוֹם] means more than the English word: it means military peace, peace between people and God, wholeness and health in your entire being, success and safety, and in this case all the messianic blessings promised in scripture for the end times.
- It's a big word, a big promise. What God was telling them was that they needed to build the temple, but God would take care of all the rest. Knowing that God promised the end result would be glory for the temple and peace for the Jews would motivate these people to complete the construction of the temple.

† **[16: Hebrews]** The New Testament quotes Haggai in **Hebrews 12.26-29 ESV: ...now he [God] has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." This phrase [beginning] "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken-- that is, things that have been made-- in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.**

- Hebrews makes it clear Haggai was talking about the time of judgment of the nations which will occur at the second coming of Christ, when he will establish his unshakable millennial kingdom.
- The elaboration in Hebrews should be incredibly motivating for us: like the people of Haggai's day, we can see that our God is a consuming fire, [יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת], God Almighty, God who will force the nations to submit to the reign of Christ as the ultimate Davidic king.
- From the New Testament revelation, we know that when Christ is king, not only will his kingdom be unshakable, we will be a part of it; this is part of our inheritance, our deliverance or salvation.
- Under the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit indwells us, so we know God's Spirit is always with us; and we are united with Christ, so that our deliverance is assured. All this should motivate us to worship God with reverence and awe, for God has amazing power and amazing grace.

† **[17: Revelation]** Haggai's people did rebuild the temple over the next four years, and God allowed them to use gold and silver taken by the Babylonians long ago [Ezra 5.14-16; 7.15-16].

- Hundreds of years later, Herod would expand the temple mount and increase the ornateness of the temple and the surrounding complex. Many Gentiles visited this temple, as did Jesus.
- In AD70, however, because of Jewish rejection of the Messiah, God allowed the Romans to raze the temple down to the bedrock, and it stands in ruins today. The Temple Mount today even has two Islamic mosques on it!
- That might seem to negate Haggai's prophecy, but scholar Robert Chisholm notes that back in v.3, God referred to both Solomon's temple and the construction in Haggai's day as "this

temple.” To God it was the same temple. “In the same way,” says Chisholm, “a future temple could be regarded as a later phase of this historic temple.” The prophecy will still come true.

† After the 1000 year reign of Christ in the millennial kingdom, there will be a final, permanent kingdom with no sin, no crime, no war. Then there will be no need for a physical temple at all.

- **Revelation 21.22 ESV: And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.** Before that time, Haggai’s prophecy will come true.

Conclusions

† **[18: website]** Before I went to seminary, I used to think these eschatological prophecies were pretty useless, because they did not tell us how to live our lives today. Now I think that is incorrect.

- From this prophecy, we are reminded that God can defeat the greatest powers or nations on earth. He can shape human history, alter nature, even supernaturally divide a sea at just the right moment, to make happen what he wants to happen.
- And I find it comforting to know God promises to do this in the end. I get discouraged seeing horrific world events, pervasive corruption in government, illegal behavior by American businesses, bias in the media, and the decline of morality or even sensibility in our culture. I am encouraged to know that someday it will end, someday Christ will return and demand an accounting, someday he will set all things right again, and rule over the earth as king.
- Such prophecy shows us that Jesus is even more magnificent than often taught in churches. He is the savior, but he is more. He is the Messiah or Christ promised to the Jews and even before that to Adam and Eve, but he is more. He is the head of the church he founded, he is the high priest at God the Father’s right hand, advocating for us, he is God the Father’s anointed judge, but he is more. And though there is nothing greater than the Son of God, which he is, we can say that he is more in the sense that there is more to know about him.
- You see, Jesus is the king; not just king of our hearts, or king of Christians, or even the king of the earth someday, he is the king of the Jews, descended from David, he is the prophesied Son of Man and Davidic king, which makes him God’s ultimate representative on Earth. When he rode that donkey into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he deliberately was fulfilling prophecy and thereby was declaring he was this king. And the people knew it, shouting “Hosanna!” “Please save us!” trusting that Jesus was the one who came in the name of Yahweh to save them.
- If you ignore end times prophecy – or grossly misinterpret it – then you miss out on part of who Jesus is, you miss out on part of what is so cool about scripture, how it all ties together in Christ, and you miss out on the faith of every one of God’s promises coming true. Honestly, though I am not Jewish, it comforts me to know that Jesus will return as king of Israel, that he will rule the world from Jerusalem, because that means God keeps his promises, and I am clinging to the promises he made to us.
- Like Haggai’s people, we are reassured to know God’s Spirit testifies to us. In this New Covenant time period, everyone who comes to saving faith in Jesus has the Holy Spirit indwell them. Thus we need never worry about God’s presence with us, his empowerment of what he wants us to do, or his security of our souls if doing his work costs us our lives.
- Now... if we sense all this about God, about Jesus, about their plans for history, it seems to me this should shape who we are and how we respond to God and his revelation. Let’s pray . . .