

Haggai 2.10-19 Reflections

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Day 1

Learn: Read Haggai 2.10-19. The first exiles returned to the Jerusalem area in 538BC. On August 29, 520BC, Haggai gave his first prophecy about people's priorities being off [Haggai 1]. On September 21, Haggai shared God's encouragement [Haggai 1.13]. On October 17, Haggai prophesied about the end times [Haggai 2.1-9]. In late November or early December, Zechariah began to prophesy to the same people [Zechariah 1.1-6]. On December 18, Haggai gave his last two known prophecies [Haggai 2.10-23]. On February 15, 519BC, Zechariah had his night visions [Zechariah 1.7-6.15]. In 457BC, the second group of exiles arrived, led by Ezra.

In Haggai 2.10-19, the all-powerful and sovereign God asked the priests about an issue in the Mosaic Law. All of God's dealings with Old Testament Israel were governed by the Mosaic Covenant, which included the law. Read Leviticus 6.25-27. This is a verse with varying translations, but the NIV seems to answer the question in Haggai 2.12 when it says, "Whatever touches any of the flesh will become holy." The meat was holy because it was consecrated [set apart] for God, and a garment that carried the meat would then also become holy. But the law did not say anywhere that something then touching the garment would become holy.

Reflect: Perhaps the people of Haggai's day had deluded themselves into thinking they could gain holiness merely by association with holy things. Maybe they were thinking that just by being born into the people of God, with holy priests and holy sacrifices and soon to be a holy temple again, they themselves must be holy. People today sometimes assume they are acceptable to God for reasons other than grace. How many of these reasons can you call to mind? Why are they delusions and what is the only way to become acceptable to God?

Day 2

Learn: Read Haggai 2.11-13. God is perfect, pure, and holy, so he allows into his presence only what has been consecrated [set apart] for him and thereby purified. God decreed what in creation was clean or unclean to him. Only what was clean could be consecrated and thus declared holy by God and allowed into his presence. When things or people went from clean to unclean because of an event, like touching a dead body, there was a ceremony for cleaning them again. That is why this is referred to as "ritual" or "ceremonial" cleanness.

God again asked the priests about the law. Read Numbers 19.22. Uncleanness was like a disease, easily passed along from one person or object to another. Some historical context is helpful here. One reason the people had been discouraged in their first attempts to rebuild the temple was resistance from the Samaritans. The Samaritans were the people living in the land when the exiles returned. They were part Hebrew and part Gentile, their ancestors being mixed from the Hebrews left behind after the exile and the various people groups exiled into the land when the Babylonians conquered other places. Displacement, distrust, economic scarcity, racial bias, and religious differences caused friction between the Samaritans and the Jews. Another source of Jewish discouragement was the realization that the temple they were building would be a shabby affair compared to what Solomon had constructed originally. Apparently in answer to prayer against these two discouragements, the Persian government ordered the Samaritans to stop hindering the temple construction and start providing materials for it. This must have seemed welcome news to the frustrated Jews, but not to God, because the Samaritans were ceremonially unclean, so it was impossible for them to contribute anything holy to the temple construction; anything they did contribute would be unclean and make the temple unclean.

Reflect: If the Jews associated with Samaritans for building the temple, what would happen to the Jews with regard to cleanness? In the New Covenant, there are no unclean people or things in this sense. But list some activities or man-made things which are common in society, but which God's people should avoid anyway.

Day 3

Learn: Read Haggai 2.11-14. The Jews in Haggai's day were unclean in God's sight for two reasons. One was their association with unclean things like the Samaritans. Surely God wanted the Jews to minister to the Samaritans, but he wanted his representative covenant people to rebuild the temple on their own. Read Zechariah 1.1-6. This contemporary prophecy shows the Jews were unclean also because of unrepentant sin.

In one sense, Christians under the New Covenant can never become unclean in God's sight. You accept God's gift of salvation ["grace" means *unmerited* favor] by accepting in faith the gospel about who Jesus is [the divine Son of God who came to earth as the human Messiah-savior] and that in his sacrifice he appeased God's wrath [propitiation] so you could have peace and reconciliation with God [atonement]. When you put your faith in Jesus, God declares you to be righteous in his sight [justification], because he is accounting to you the righteousness of Jesus [imputed righteousness]. In that moment, you are born again spiritually [regenerated] and set apart for God's purposes [positional sanctification]. Because you are declared righteous and set apart for God, you indeed are holy in his sight! You can never lose that status, it is a gift from God, so in that sense you can never be made unclean in God's sight, not even by association with unclean people or things.

Reflect: Why is it important to understand the above paragraph? Can you see how, if you did not understand this, you could never know for sure that you would go to Heaven? Can you see how, if you did not understand this, you could be deceived into thinking you had to be good enough to get to Heaven, good enough to keep what was given to you? How does it make you feel to know you can never lose God's love or salvation?

Day 4

Learn: Read Haggai 2.14 again. This must have been a tremendous shock. The people considered themselves the faithful remnant, God's image bearers. They had repented and started building the temple. And temple worship was essential, since that was where the priests had access to God and where they gave sacrifices to appease God's wrath until Christ would come. Now God was saying they were unclean and thus so were all their efforts at sacrifice and temple building.

Even though you cannot lose your right legal standing with God once you have accepted Christ's sacrifice on your behalf [as discussed yesterday], you can experientially either walk with God or walk away from God; you can be in God's light or you can walk in the shadows. When you choose to sin, you are walking away from God, relationally separating yourself from him. You do not lose your salvation, but you do taint yourself and harm your intimacy with God. In this sense, experientially though not legally, you do become unclean. Read 1 John 1.9. God's solution is for us to repentantly confess to him, thanking him for forgiveness and cleansing.

Reflect: Consider the ways you most often sin. Are you willing to repent of them now, to admit your error and request God's help in conforming to his will? Take time now to confess to God about these sins. Follow the same steps for any other sins you have committed recently. Does it feel good to be cleansed?

Day 5

Learn: Read Haggai 2.10-19. God had been disciplining the people with covenant curses since they had first returned to the land, but it did not prove effective in calling them to obedience. Now the people were trying to be obedient, but they still would have a winter of inadequate food from the last harvest and they still had unclean associations and sin. Now, however, they were reassured about God's blessing.

Reflect: Read Hebrews 12.6. God continues to discipline his people, but it is harder to tell because we do not have the same system of blessings and curses as Israel had. Are there reasons God might discipline you? What is one way you learned this week to stay right with God despite the ongoing battle with sin in your life?