

HAGGAI: TEACHER'S NOTES

Title: The prophet and his commission. [1:1]

It has been 16 years since the Jews had returned from captivity. God calls on Haggai and Zechariah to encourage the people to resume rebuilding the temple. (Ezra 3:8; 4:24) Haggai's message is directed to Zerubbabel (Sheshbazzar), the governor, and Joshua, the high priest.

I. First Message Rebuke for religious indifference and admonition to build the Temple. [chapter 1]

A. The message. (2-11)

1. The people's selfishness and unconcern. (2-6)
 - a. Their selfishness. (2-4) The people do not think that the time to rebuild the temple has come. Haggai's message comes in the form of a rebuke. According to Jehovah, it is past time to rebuild. The people were too busy building "ceiled houses" to be concerned with the temple. "Ceiled" indicates more than just rudimentary shelter, perhaps even opulent.
 - b. Their ways and the result: curse. (5,6) What had they accomplished since their return from Babylon? Because of their selfishness, Jehovah had cursed them with a lack of necessities. There was not enough food, drink, clothing or money, to allow the people to live comfortably.
2. The divine displeasure and exhortation to resume the building operation. (7-11)
 - a. Consider your ways get busy. (7,8) The prophet indicates that prosperity will come only if they build the Lord's house. They will have to get busy and go up the mountain for timbers to begin the building.
 - b. The visitation from God. (9-11) Because the people had returned from captivity with a selfish attitude, God had not blessed them. He had actually stood in their way. To be utterly concerned with one's own welfare and ignore the things of God, can bring only retributive consequences. Jehovah had even withheld the heavy dew, which was important during Israel's dry season.

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- Remember, the prophets from before the captivity prophesied that only a remnant would return. Four of the five books written after the return refer to those returning as the remnant. Jehovah has fulfilled all of His promises made to the remnant: the land promise and the Messiah. The only thing left for the Jews is salvation through Jesus Christ. Now Haggai speaks a word of encouragement from the Lord, to the people. He assures them that the Lord is with them. Within

four weeks of Haggai's initial prophecy concerning the rebuilding of the temple, work had begun. The temple had been in ruins nearly 70 years.

II. Second message Consolation to those in despair: the glory of the new temple. [2:1-9]

- A. Jehovah's presence with the builders. (1-5) In conjunction with the rebuilding, a second message comes from Jehovah through Haggai. Those who had lived through the captivity and now returned to see the desolation of the city and the temple, were of course disheartened. Haggai encourages them and the younger ones to carry on. The new temple would not be as opulent as Solomon's, but it did not need to be to be acceptable to Jehovah. Their strength in the effort could be found in the Lord (Eph. 6:10). While the Lord provides the strength, the people must do the work. As always with God, strength, through faith, combined with work will remove all obstacles. God's promise to be with them was in accordance with such passages as (Ex. 19:5,6; 24:8; 29:45).
- B. The temple's future glory. (6-9) Gifts to restore the temple had been given from different sources, such as the Kings of the Medes and Persians as well as the Jews themselves. Yet these gifts were not enough to restore the temple properly (see Ezra 1,3,6,7 and Isa. 60:5,11). The exact meaning of these verses is open to much debate among the OT scholars, especially the phrase "this latter house shall be greater than the former." Perhaps it is a comparison of Zerubbabel's temple at completion with itself at the beginning. Or it may be a description of the glory of the church built by Christ to any of the man-made temples of the Jews (Eph. 2:21,22; 1 Cor. 3:16,17; Heb. 12:26-29).

III. Third message Completion of the temple a guarantee of blessings of nature. [2:10-19]

- A. The people's uncleanness a result of their own conduct. (10-14)
 - 1. Their punishment the result of their own uncleanness impressed by two questions. (10-13)
 - a. Question one: Communication of holiness by holy objects on contact. (10-12) The third message came exactly three months after the work had begun on the temple. These questions were proposed to the priests because it was their responsibility to teach the people the difference between clean and unclean (Lev. 10:8-10; Deut. 17:8-13). Holiness is not communicated by contact with holy objects (Lev. 6:27).
 - b. Question two: Communication of legal defilement by contact. (13) However, an unclean object can defile a clean object (Lev. 21:1,11; Num. 6:6-8; 19:11-13,22).
 - 2. Application to Israel the cause of their uncleanness. (14) The word "nation" here may indicate that Jehovah does not fully regard Israel as His people. Because they had not taken the appropriate steps under the Law to

cleanse themselves, their works were automatically defiled. Once cleansed from their defilement, then and only then would Jehovah's presence be felt among them.

- B. Indifference has produced calamity; zeal will restore prosperity. (15-19) The prophet calls on the people to recall the past 15 years and see that their efforts have not produced as they should. Jehovah pronounces this lack as judgment upon them to try and turn their hearts to Him. The people must come to realize that all production and fruitfulness depends on the Lord. The prophet confirms that this day is a turning point and blessings are to follow.

IV. Fourth message Renewal of the promise of salvation: exaltation of Zerubbabel [2:20-23]

- A. Overthrow of the nations. (20-22) This message came on the same day as the third message. It points beyond material blessings and towards spiritual hope. The heathen nations will eventually be overthrown and blessings will come through Zerubbabel (David's descendant). As brought out by the prophets, Jehovah will use one heathen nation to destroy another and then raise a third to destroy the destroyer.
- B. Messianic hope preserved in Zerubbabel. (23) To make Zerubbabel a signet or a seal was an honor because it made him the authentic designee of God. (For more about seals see: Song 8:6; Jer. 22:24,30.) The promise originally made to David in (2 Sam. 7:11-14) is now revived in Zerubbabel. The final fulfillment of this promise would not come in the person of Zerubbabel, but through his lineage (Mt. 1:12,16).

Applications for Today

- A. 1:2-6 - We cannot put our trust in our material possessions and be rich in God's sight. Mt. 6:19-21; Lu. 12:16-21.
- B. 2:15-19 God expects us to prioritize our lives according to His wishes, not ours. True happiness can only be found when we do it God's way. Mt. 6:33; Lu. 14:16-24; 1 Tim. 6:6-10, 17-19.