

Haggai begins and ends with Zerubbabel.

Because the gospel begins and ends with Jesus, the Son of David!

“The parallel with David is striking,
for David wanted to build the Lord’s house,
and in response the Lord vowed to build the king’s house.” (Motyer, 964)

Now, God calls the Son of David to build the Lord’s house.

It might even sound like Haggai is saying that if only Israel will build the temple,
then economic prosperity will immediately follow!

You can see how someone could wind up with a sort of “prosperity gospel”:
if you focus on building God’s house –
then God will give you everything you desire!

And there is some truth to that!

If your *desire* is to see the prosperity of the kingdom of Christ –
then God will give you your heart’s desire!
Because your heart’s desire will be exactly what God desires!

Our problem comes when we turn our desires away from God’s temple.
And our problem comes from our own hearts.

Look at Haggai 2:14 –

It is not defective offerings that defile a people –
rather, it is defiled people that offer defective offerings!

“The refusal to build the house was the rejection of the offer of grace,
the grace of divine indwelling.” (Motyer, 965)

“But...the building of the house is not a cultic technique whereby humans pressure...God;
it is an act of obedience performed in the faith that God will keep his promise.” (M 965)

As we saw last time,

the prophet Haggai addresses the people of God
at a time when they were rebuilding their lives after the exile –
rebuilding their houses – restoring their fields and vineyards –
but not really seeking the LORD.

They were drifting.

Drifting is dangerous.

Last time I quoted D. A. Carson and his warning that:

“People do not drift toward holiness.

Apart from grace-driven effort,

people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture,
faith, and delight in the Lord.

We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance;

we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom;

we drift toward superstition and call it faith.

We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation;

we slouch toward prayerlessness

and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism;

we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.”

(D. A. Carson, *For the Love of God*, 2.25).

The only way to holiness is the way of the cross.

Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus.

Or as Haggai 2:4 puts it: “Work, for I am with you, declares the LORD of Hosts.”

And since *all of the Christian life* is about temple building –

building up the body of Christ –

Haggai’s basic point is a point that we need to hear!

1. The Future of the Temple (v1-9)

a. The Former Glory and This Dinky House (v1-3)

In the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet:

Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to the Jews

at the time of the rebuilding of the temple (Ez 5:1, 6:14).

In Ezra we heard that the builders laid the foundation of the temple during the reign of Cyrus.

King Cyrus of Persia had issued his decree,

allowing the return and the rebuilding of the temple in 538.

Zerubbabel and Jeshua had returned and laid the foundation.

but then the enemies of Jerusalem opposed them and the work stopped
until the reign of Darius.

So it was not until the 2nd year of Darius (ca. 520 BC) that the work resumed.

We know from Ezra 6:15 that they *finished* the temple in the 6th year of Darius (515).

The book of Haggai focuses entirely on a five month period from August 29 to December 18, 520.

There are six “time stamps” in the book that take us through these months.

1:1 – 1st day of sixth month (Aug 29, 520)
1:15 – 24th day of sixth month (Sept 21)
2:1 – 21st day of seventh month (Oct 17)
2:10 – 24th day of 9th month (Dec 18)
2:20 – 24th day of 9th month (Dec 18)

The 21st day of the seventh month comes on the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles.
At the Feast of Tabernacles the people were to dwell in booths (or tents)
as a reminder of how the Lord provided for them when they were in the wilderness.

This is a month after the work began on the Lord's house (1:15).
They've been working – but it's not looking very promising!

² *“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, ³ ‘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?’*

The temple had been destroyed 67 years earlier.
Only a few elderly folk would have remembered the former temple.
And they would have been children when it was destroyed!

When you are a child, everything seems bigger –
because, in relation to *you*, it is!

But this is the temple of the LORD!
This is the place where earth and heaven meet!
The place where God said that his name would dwell among his people.

They are remembering God's glorious house –
and so now as they see the beginnings of the second temple –
as they see how small and dinky it is going to be –
they weep.

The prophet Zechariah will speak of this as the “day of small things” –
or the day of “small beginnings.” (Zech 4:10)

As Pastor Joel and the Elkhart mission work begin to get underway,
it is also a “day of small things.”
This is often the case in church planting
(as it was for the apostles).
It was the case here at MCPC 18 years ago –
when a “remnant” was all that was left.

In my first month preaching at MCPC, I remember a man who told me
“South Bend needs a PCA church – but this isn’t it.”

In a very real way, the remnant in Jerusalem would have been tempted to say,
“the world needs a redeemed humanity – but this isn’t it!”

But the LORD has a very different message for his people:

b. Work, for I Am with You – My Spirit Remains in Your Midst (v4-5)

⁴ 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, ⁵ according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not.

There are three commands:

Be strong (repeated three times)
Work.
Fear not.

All three of these commands are rooted in *one reason*:

“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.”

Why can we be strong?

Why can we work at building the temple of God?

Why should we not fear?

Because God is with us!

The Spirit of God – the glory-cloud – had left Mt. Sinai and come to dwell in the tabernacle.
And that Spirit remains in your midst.

Because God is faithful to his covenant!

And he *promised* Israel that he would dwell with them forever.

But what about Ezekiel’s vision?

Ezekiel had seen the glory of the LORD depart from the temple!
And when they finished rebuilding the temple,
according to Ezra-Nehemiah there was no glory cloud!
The glory of the LORD did not return to the temple!

So where is the glory of the LORD?

There are two promises clearly in play here:

God's promise to David – that David's heir would sit on his throne forever.

God's promise to Israel through Moses – that God would be with his people forever.

And both of those are rooted in God's promise to Abraham –

that all the nations would be blessed through Abraham's seed.

And so we need to see how God brings this together in verses 6-9:

c. The Latter Glory of This House – and the Shaking of All Nations (v6-9)

⁶ 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. ⁷ 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. ⁸ The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts. ⁹ 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. ”

I have to admit the absurdity of all this.

Israel is a little bitty country the size of New Jersey.

Judah is even smaller –

just a little larger than St. Joe and Elkhart Counties put together.

If Yahweh is the Lord of Hosts –

the Creator of the heavens and the earth –

surely he could do better than this dinky little temple –

and this dinky little people who keep rebelling against him!!

Well, sure!

But he is not the sort of deity who *needs* worshipers.

His plan is to bring peace – *shalom* – in *this place* –

and so he will accomplish this in his time!

But his plan includes this temple.

This temple – this place – is crucial to redemptive history!

The latter glory of *this house* shall be greater than the former glory.

Why does God say this?

Oh, sure, Herod the Great will engage in a massive beautification project

and make the Jerusalem temple “glorious.”

(And yes, that *was* an example of the silver and gold of the nations flowing into the temple!)

But Haggai is not telling us to marvel at some foreign building project!
Certainly the decree of Darius – the decree of Artaxerxes –
and the work of Herod the Great –
are all part of the fulfillment of Haggai's words.

And all of those partial fulfillments were necessary
in order that there *be a temple* where the Virgin Mary
could bring her son to be purified, according to the law.

And when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to that temple,
then truly was it fulfilled
that the latter glory was greater than the former glory!
For Solomon's temple was filled with the glory of the LORD
as the Holy Spirit filled the sanctuary –

but *this temple* was filled with the glory of the only Begotten Son of God –
a glory that was veiled for the moment!

But Simeon and Anna saw it!

That is what it means that “I will shake the heavens and the earth” or “I will shake the nations”?
It's not necessarily referring to a physical shaking.
Think of Psalm 18 – where David cries for help,
and the LORD shakes the mountains and comes down.
The point is that when God shakes the heavens and the earth
salvation comes to those who wait upon the LORD!

Shaking the heavens and the earth is the language of judgment.
Hebrews 12 takes up this language – quoting Haggai 2 –
and saying that God will once again shake the heavens and the earth.

And Hebrews 12 uses this language in the same context as Haggai 2 –
“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.” (12:28-29)

So God says to his weak, feeble people –
work, because I am with you –
work, not because you are so strong – but because I am so strong!

As one commentator puts it,

“Despondency says ‘I can’t, therefore I won’t’;
obedience of faith says, ‘I can’t, but *he* can, so *I* will.’”

2. The Future of the Law (v10-19)

a. The Law: the Unclean Contaminates the Clean (v10-14)

¹⁰ *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,*

The last day recorded in the book of Haggai
is the 24th day of the ninth month.

Haggai may well have continued preaching for years afterwards.

There were many prophets in the OT – and only a few had messages that were written down.
These five messages over four months in the fall of 520 BC
were the only ones added to the canon.

And the final message has two parts.

They apply the message of Haggai regarding the temple
to the Law and to the House of David.

The fact that they both come on the same day – the 24th day of the 9th month –
means that we should see these two messages together.

And first, we start with the question of *holy* and *unclean*.

¹¹ *“Thus says the LORD of hosts: Ask the priests about the law: ¹² ‘If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?’” The priests answered and said, “No.”*

Touching something holy does not make *you* holy.

¹³ *Then Haggai said, “If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?” The priests answered and said, “It does become unclean.”*

But if someone who is unclean from contact with a dead body touches anything else,
it does become unclean.

Touching something holy does not make you holy.

But if you are unclean,
then everything you touch becomes unclean.

Now, before we say anything else, we need to watch where Haggai takes it next:

¹⁴ Then Haggai answered and said, “So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, declares the LORD, and so with every work of their hands. And what they offer there is unclean.

Notice what Haggai just said:

The problem with Israel is that they are unclean.
And so what they offer is unclean.

There is an echo here of Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones.
The death of the exile continues to contaminate the people of God.
So long as Israel remains in exile –
so long as they are contaminated by death –
everything they offer will be unclean!

The Jews understood this very well.

Think of it this way:
when Jesus cleansed the leper – when Jesus *touch*ed a dead body –
did he become unclean?

Why not?

Doesn’t the unclean contaminate the clean?
Yes – under the Law, that was true.
But when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us –
now there was a holy flesh and blood –
and the holiness of Jesus cleanses the unclean!

And Haggai is heading that direction:

b. Consider How It Was Before the Restoration of the Temple: Blighted (v15-17)

¹⁵ Now then,

(Or to translate it more brusquely): “But now” –
this is the same word used in chapter 1, verse 5, which was the turning point of chapter 1.

Here’s how it once was.

But NOW!

Then follow two calls to “consider.”

We saw two calls to consider in chapter 1 –
“consider your ways” (v5) – set your heart on your path –
think about where you have come from.
And again in 1:7, “consider your ways” – set your heart on your path –
think about the way that you are walking.

Now once again God calls Israel to “consider.”

consider from this day onward.^[a] Before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the LORD,¹⁶ how did you fare? When^[b] one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty.¹⁷ I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and with mildew and with hail, yet you did not turn to me, declares the LORD.

Before the temple of the LORD was rebuilt,
how did you fare?

Everything failed.

God struck them over and over – but they did not turn back to the LORD.

But now!!

God is doing something new!

And so he says again: *consider...*

c. Consider How It Is After the Foundation Was Laid: Blessing (v18-19)

¹⁸ Consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day that the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid, consider: ¹⁹ Is the seed yet in the barn? Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have yielded nothing. But from this day on I will bless you.”

It was on the 24th day of the sixth month that they began the work.

Now, on the 24th day of the ninth month (three months later)
they have finished the harvest –

and once again, it has been a very bad year:

“the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have yielded nothing...”

But from this day on I will bless you.

When you return to the LORD – and *work, for I am with you* –
when you are seeking first God's kingdom and his righteousness –
then “all these things will be added to you.”

For the remnant in the days of Haggai,
seeking first the kingdom of God meant *building the temple*.
That was the thing that God had called them to do.

For us, seeking first the kingdom of God means *building the temple*.

As Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 3:10,

“According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder
I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it.”

Pastors – preachers – are ‘temple builders’ –

“Do you not know that you are God’s temple
and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”

And all of us are ‘body builders’ – as Paul says in Ephesians 4:15-16,

“Rather, speaking the truth in love,
we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,
from whom the whole body,
joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped,
when each part is working properly,
makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

And it is worth saying that if we seek first our own kingdoms –
if we seek first our own happiness –
then we forfeit God’s blessing.

Indeed, I suspect that this is at the heart of the *final word* of the LORD to Haggai.

Because that same day there is a message that comes to Haggai,
not for the whole of the people – but *just for Zerubbabel!*

3. The Future of the House of David (v20-23)

a. The Shaking of the Nations – Like the Exodus (v20-22)

²⁰ *The word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month,*
²¹ *“Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth,*
²² *and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother.*

Once again, God speaks of “shaking” the heavens and the earth.

And as we saw before, shaking the heavens and the earth always has the feel of judgment!
Of course, God’s judgment can either be “guilty” – or “not guilty”!

God’s judgment is a *good thing* for those who are crying out for rescue!

But God speaks to Zerubbabel and says that he is about to shake the heavens and the earth,
and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms.

I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations,
and overthrow the chariots and their riders.

And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother.

When you think of chariots and riders, what do you think of?

“I’ll sing to the Lord, for he’s triumphed in glory,
the horse and its rider he’s thrown in the sea.”

God's triumph over Pharaoh at the Red Sea –
combined with the chaos of the enemy turning against themselves
(every one by the sword of his brother) – like in the days of Gideon.

So God promises that there is another Exodus coming –
another day like the crossing of the Red Sea.

And

b. David's House Restored (v23)

²³ On that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the LORD, and make you like a^[c] signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of hosts."

This is a striking statement.

God says that Zerubbabel will be his signet ring –
the ring that the king uses to authenticate his decrees.

It might seem odd –

since Zerubbabel himself never does anything particularly remarkable.

But we need to see the picture here:

Zerubbabel is the last son of David to govern Jerusalem
until the coming of King Jesus.

This final word in the book of Haggai is addressed to the Son of David
because in order for the temple to be the place of blessing and peace,
the Son of David needs to be the signet ring on God's finger.

Jesus is the Son of David who becomes the holy flesh and blood.

Jesus is the one who has the power of a divine life that is able to triumph over death.

Therefore "work, for I am with you, declares the LORD of hosts."