

Haggai

Author

Haggai (Haggai 1:1) was a prophet who, along with Zechariah, encouraged the returned exiles to rebuild the Temple (see Ezra 5:1-2; Ezra 6:14). Haggai means “festal,” which may indicate that the prophet was born during one of the three pilgrimage feasts (unleavened bread, Pentecost or weeks, and tabernacles [see Deuteronomy 16:16]). Based on Haggai 2:3 Haggai may have witnessed the destruction of Solomon’s Temple. If so, he must have been in his early 70s during the time of his ministry.

Background

In 538 BC the conqueror of Babylon, Cyrus of king of Persia, issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple (see Ezra 1:2-4; Ezra 6:3-5). Led by Zerubbabel, about 50,000 Jews journeyed home and began work on the Temple. Zerubbabel is most likely the Sheshbazzar mentioned in Ezra 1:8. About two years later (536 BC) they completed the foundation amid great rejoicing (Ezra 3:8-10). Their success aroused the Samaritans and other neighbors who feared the political and religious implications of a rebuilt Temple in a thriving Jewish state. They therefore opposed the project vigorously and managed to halt work until Darius the Great became king of Persia in 522 BC (Ezra 4:1-5; Ezra 4:24).

Date

The messages of Haggai were given during a four-month period in 520 BC, the second year of King Darius. The first message was delivered on the first day of the sixth month (August 29), the last on the 24th day of the ninth month (December 18).

Themes and Teaching

Next to Obadiah, Haggai is the shortest book in the Old Testament, but its teachings are none-the-less significant. Haggai clearly shows the consequences of disobedience (Haggai 1:6; Haggai 1:11; Haggai 2:16-17) and obedience (Haggai 2:7-9; Haggai 2:19). When the people give priority to God and His house, they are blessed rather than cursed (see Luke 12:3). Obedience brings the encouragement and strength of the spirit of God (Haggai 2:4-5).

Chapter 2 speaks of the coming of the Messiah, called “*the treasures of all nations*” in verse 7. His coming would fill the rebuilt Temple with glory (see Haggai 2:9). The Lord made Zerubbabel his “signet ring” as a guarantee that the

Messiah would come (see Haggai 2:23). These passages are linked with the judgment of the nations at Christ's Second Coming, when the nations will be shaken and kingdoms overthrown (see Haggai 2:6-7; Haggai 2:21-22; and Hebrews 12:25-29).

Literary Features

Like Malachi, Haggai uses a number of questions to highlight key issues (see Haggai 1:4; Haggai 1:9; Haggai 2:3; and Haggai 2:19). He also makes effective use of repetition: "**Consider your ways,**" "**I am with you,**" and "**I will shake the heavens and the Earth**" are all repeated. The major sections of the book are marked off by the date on which the Lord came "**to**" or "**by**" or "**through**" or "**unto.**"

Several times the prophet appears to echo other Scriptures (compare Haggai 1:6 with Deuteronomy 28:38-39 and Haggai 2:17 with Deuteronomy 28:22). The threefold use of "**be strong**" in Haggai 2:4 reflects the encouragement given in Joshua 1:6-7; Joshua 1:9; and Joshua 1:18.

Haggai: Rebuilding the Temple

Life is sometimes so difficult to understand. We read of verses that tell us that "**He is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting,**" (Psalm 106:1), but then when we look at our own lives, we find something that just does not match.

We like to hear of God's love. We like to think how God favors us and deals nicely with us. But when we start going through times of difficulty, poverty, and stressful times, we begin to actually wonder what is going on. We might say it like this:

"Why does our loving God allow His people to go through times of deprivation?"

Haggai provides one key step in trying to figure out what God is doing when things get tough. He does not give us the total picture, but we need to start here in understanding how God sometimes works out His love in unexpected ways. You might be wondering how some ancient book could be relevant to your needs. You will be surprised how God can use the truths of Haggai to speak to your heart.

In these two short chapters, Haggai leads the Israelites into one of their most strategic steps forward in all of their history – the rebuilding of the Temple. In two short chapters, the Lord through Haggai tells them what their problem is, reveals the secret of their response and shows how God brought His favor back upon them.

We often do not understand why we go through difficult times. Is it that God's love has changed or has it merely taken different shape? If He still loves us, then why are we suffering so? The Book of Haggai addresses part of this problem.

Haggai 1

- 1. In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of She-alti-el, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest,**
- 2. "Thus says the Lord of hosts: This people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord."**
- 3. Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet,**
- 4. "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?"**
- 5. Now therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider how you have fared.**
- 6. You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages earns wages to put them into a bag with holes.**
- 7. "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider how you have fared.**
- 8. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may appear in my glory, says the Lord.**
- 9. You have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says the Lord of hosts. Because of My house that lies in ruins, while you busy yourselves each with his own house.**
- 10. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the Earth has withheld its produce.**
- 11. And I have called for a drought upon the land and the hills, upon the grain, the new wine, the oil, upon what the ground brings forth, upon men and cattle, and upon all their labors."**
- 12. Then Zerubbabel the son of She-alti-el, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him; and the people feared before the Lord.**
- 13. Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message, "I am with you, says the Lord."**
- 14. And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of She-alti-el, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God,**
- 15. on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month.**

Identifying Their Problem (Haggai 1:1-11)

If we had our choice, we would never want to experience anything but God's blessings. Why is it, though, at times we actually do not experience His blessing but instead find ourselves in desperate situations? Surprising enough, difficult times are ways God speaks to us. God uses such circumstances to alert us to pay attention to something going on in our lives.

Are you feeling as if you are in a tight situation? With what are you wrestling? What particular situation or lack of something causes you to miss that peace of life? More than often these tight situations touch our financial situations, but they affect our lives overall just like it did with the Israelites.

"You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes." (Haggai 1:6)

God gets our attention by actually ***withdrawing*** His blessings. Instead of blessings, we have curses. God wants to speak to our lives' situations. He actually tells us to consider our ways.

Haggai 1:5 and Haggai 1:7 both say, ***"Consider your ways!"*** God is sending us a message!

The message cannot be easily avoided. We subconsciously draw conclusions in our minds. If everything is fine in our lives, then we think everything is okay. When things go difficult, we wonder whether God has made a mistake, or that we have done something wrong. God is so intent on getting His people's attention in certain cases that He even influences the weather patterns!

"You look for much, but behold, it comes to little; when you bring it home, I blow it away. Why?" declares the Lord of hosts, 'Because of My house which lies desolate, while each of you runs to his own house. Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew, and the Earth has withheld its produce. And I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands.'" (Haggai 1:9-11).

What is your situation? What troubles your life? For every difficulty we face in life, we are suppose to look up to God and ask Him if this is because we are disobedient in some way. This is wisdom. The foolish man never gets the connection. He goes at full pace into worse and worse situations.

Were the Israelites doing something wrong in this case? They sure were. What was their disobedience? The Lord summarizes His difficulty with them in Haggai 1:4.

"Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?"

Their lives were built around caring for their own families rather than God's concerns. The 'paneled' houses were not normal back then. They sound rather luxurious. By mentioning them, it is like emphasizing to what degree they have regularly made wrong priorities. For us it might be those entertainment centers, video rentals, etc., which all have taken away our time and maybe even affecting our ability to give to the church our freewill offerings. Or perhaps it is those luncheon buffets, lottery tickets or fancy cars when others are scraping to get by and the poor get poorer. Idolatry occurs when man serves man's interest first rather than God's.

What priorities in our lives have caused us to give less than we ought to God's work whether it be in money, time or effort? This is a question every family, church or individual will need to face some day.

If focusing on their own ways was the problem, what was the solution? God clearly tells them in verse 8.

“Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the house, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified,” “says the Lord.” (Haggai 1:8)

God has no problem helping people to know how to serve and give. The biggest problem is getting His people to turn back to prioritizing His own needs first. The need is often the place we will find a solution. Problems arise when we are not positively affirming God's clear will.

For example, in this case if they just noticed that they avoided going around the Temple area because it would make them feel guilty, then they should realize God might have them correct the problem by rebuilding the Temple. It seems the guilt was amassing because once someone mentioned the problem, they all as one agreed they need to do something about it. The mature Christian is always seeking for God's will; they will not need to be rebuked by a “prophet” to know they ought to do something.

The spiritual principle then is that we should always prioritize God's will over our own conveniences. What God wants is more important than what we want, ***because it will always be the right thing to do.*** We change our lifestyle to seek Him, His will and then make decisions that will involve us in doing those things. This is the life of a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

God has a whole set of commands that are to help us regulate our lives. Anytime that we allow our own preferences to break His commands, we show that we do not worship God the Maker but man the created. We are idolaters. God sent the trouble that came upon the Israelites; it was no accident.

“And I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands.” (Haggai 1:11)

When we start feeling the 'tightness of living,' we need to immediately and humbly turn to the Lord and see if we are neglecting something that He desires. We are wise when we examine our lives as an inventory list to check out our faithfulness.

Am I loving the people around me?

Have I done what He has told me to do?

Have I refused to do those things which I am not to do (temptations)?

Am I spending my money wisely? Am I eating out too much? Am I buying too many gifts? Am I going on spending binges?

Are my hobbies or interests keeping me away from my time with God?

We must remember that having difficult times doesn't automatically put a person in 'chastisement' mode. Chastisement is judgment with the purpose of bringing His people back closer to God.

There are other kinds of testing.

If we do not see any immediate reason for God's disappointment in our lives or in our attitudes, then we must assume God's faithfulness is using these circumstances in our lives for some other reason. Below are three biblical cases where God was not chastising but testing their hearts so to prove their true desire to know Him and increase their faith.

In Job's case trials were there to increase faith. (Book of Job)

“Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.” (James 5:11)

Jacob needed to persevere in doing good (wrestle) to get the blessing that he desired.

“Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. But he said, ‘I will not let you go unless You bless me.’ So He said to him, ‘What is Your name?’ And he said, ‘Jacob.’ And He said, ‘Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.” (Genesis 32:24-28)

Daniel's prayer was hindered because of the devil's holding power.

“Then he said to me, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia.’” (Daniel 10:12-13)

We always need to examine our hearts. If we do not find any sin, then we need to accept that God is bringing us through special testing to see the genuineness of our desire to trust and believe in Him. Joseph is an excellent example of how God trained and used someone going through difficult circumstances.

Hearing what God wants us to do is one thing, but our response to God's message makes a world of difference in what happens next in our lives.

Haggai 2

- 1. In the second year of Darius the king, in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet,***
- 2. "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of She-alti-el, 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 that saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not in your sight as nothing?***
- 4. ‘Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel,’ says the Lord; ‘take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land,’ says the Lord; ‘work, for I am with you,’ says the Lord of hosts,***
- 5. ‘according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit abides among you; fear not.***
- 6. ‘For thus says the Lord of hosts: Once again, 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 splendor,’ says the Lord of hosts.***
- 8. ‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ says the Lord of hosts.***

9. *'The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former,' says the Lord of hosts; 'and in this place I will give prosperity,' says the Lord of hosts.'*"
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,*
11. *"Thus says the Lord of hosts: Ask the priests to decide this question,*
12. *'If one carries holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and touches with his skirt bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any kind of food, does it become holy?'" The priests answered, "No."*
13. *Then said Haggai, "If one who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?" The priests answered, "It does become unclean."*
14. *Then Haggai said, "'So is it with this people, and with this nation before Me,' says the Lord; 'and so with every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.*
15. *'Pray now, consider what will come to pass from this day onward. Before a stone was placed upon a stone in the Temple of the Lord,*
16. *'how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten; when one came to the winevat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty.*
17. *'I smote you and all the products of your toil with blight and mildew and hail; yet you did not return to Me,' says the Lord.*
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? Do the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree still yield nothing? From this day on I will bless you.'"*
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 fellow.*
23. *'On that day,' says the Lord of hosts, 'I will take you, O Zerubbabel My servant, the son of She-alti-el,' says the Lord, 'and make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you,' says the Lord of hosts."*

Responding to His Message (Haggai 1:12-2:9)

Confrontation is always difficult. We risk our relationship and acceptance from others. Haggai, however, rightly responds to God's calling by boldly confronting the Israelites as we saw in section one.

By fully relating what was on God's mind, the people could see what was on God's mind and respond to Him. This initiated one of the most wonderful reforms we see in Scripture. Three individuals or groups were mentioned.

1) Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, was the governor of Judah. He represented the government. It is important to keep the rule of the country out of the hands of the religious clergy. When the religious leaders seize a country's rule, all sorts of unnecessary and excessive reforms are brought upon the people that shame the name of God.

2) Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, was the high priest. He played a key role in influencing the people and the governor of the land. His job was to intercede before God for the people. He was to listen to God and help the people understand God's will.

3) The remnant of the people also responded warmly to the Lord. This remnant was the people who came back from the exile. They are the ones whom the Spirit of God prodded to go back on over the desert region to fight for a living in their old devastated land of Judah. (Read Nehemiah or Ezra for more background information.)

Haggai 1:12 speaks of the key change that occurred that made the difference between blessing and curse. They obeyed the Yahweh their God.

“Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him. And the people showed reverence for the Lord.” (Haggai 1:12)

Obedience is the best sign of repentance. Repentance requires a change in which a people would respond to God. Obedience is what God really wanted in the first place. In this case, it requires a person to do what God originally wanted. In many cases God's standards gradually decline and no one is there holding up God's standard in front of His people. The people slide down into patterns of sin and protectionism. They might think they are fine but God does not think that way! They need God's prophet to speak and lead them out back to God's green pastures.

What happened as a result of their obedience? Everything significant and good came from that decision to humble oneself and do what God always wanted. The larger the group and the more categories of society that are included in that decision to obey the Lord, the more influence the revival will have on the society. We see here the political forces joined with the religious forces and the people for a genuine true revival. A prophet spoke and the people obeyed, but there was another important step.

We find that the Lord stirred up the spirit of these people to do the work.

“So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God,” (Haggai 1:14).

Each person or group that obeyed the Lord was soon moved by the Spirit of God to do God's work. Have you ever noticed that a spirit of defeat often roams around the churches? This is the opposite of the Spirit's work. The Spirit of God is the mobilizer of the people to rightly respond to God by equipping them to do His work.

If we notice the **spirit of defeat** around us, we should look for areas that we have disobeyed the Lord. What areas have we neglected to respond? Have we allowed a selfish materialism block out the glory of serving the Lord? Obedience brings mobilization. We treat the **depression** of man and woman by first seeking which ways they might have compromised their full loyalty to God. God is the mobilizer. If all is well, He comes and enables us to do His good will. When we see that depression, we should pay careful attention to our lives.

The Lord's Presence

Haggai in 1:13 declared that the Lord was with them. ***“I am with you.”*** What a difference that makes when we know God is with us!

Most of our projects show only that man is with us.

Man's plans for increase in the church or ministry are plagued by ways of the worlds. Pragmatists say that if it works, use it. But they do not realize that God's ways bring glory to Him while man's ways bring no special worship of God. Most building projects show that man is with us. We bring debt rather than faith into the picture. Fights and long discussions substitute praise times for God's direction and provisions. We find something radically different here; a renewal takes place because God is there.

The other morning I was speaking with a brother about dead churches. He commented how a community around a Bible college that he was familiar with was plagued with witchcraft and occult. He off-hand mentioned that people are seeking these dark means of spirit communication because they cannot hear God speak in the churches! There is much truth in this. Is God rooted in our ministries? Are they 'our' churches or ministries or God's? Is His undiluted and uncorrupted word being spread in our churches? Or are we merely spending time in spreading a 'social' gospel?

Further Encouragement

After a month of extremely hard work, God sent the prophet again to encourage them. Evidently some of the workers or perhaps onlookers, were greatly discouraged by the sad shape this new Temple building was taking. There were some old timers who had evidently seen the former Temple in all its glory. They had heard story after story about the glitter of gold on the old Temple. After all, the gold and silver, the ornaments, the cyprus trees, etc., were all lacking. We can imagine this Temple was very splendid, indeed. But in comparison, it greatly lacked the embellishments that King Solomon gave the former one.

God encouraged them by stating how this Temple's glory would not be in its construction but by what this Temple represented. God was going to do a new work that would go far beyond that Temple. Truly it was nothing like before (Haggai 2:3-4). The significance of this Temple would not only be great but greater.

“The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,” says the Lord of hosts, “and in this place I shall give peace,” declares the Lord of hosts. (Haggai 2:9)

When they came out of Egypt, they only had a Tabernacle, a tent. The Lord, however, was in their midst. His Spirit is again abiding in their midst. In the former situation, the Lord shook Mt. Sinai, but now God is going to shake the heavens and the Earth.

“And I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations; and I will fill this house with glory,” says the Lord of hosts. (Haggai 2:7, NASB)

The glory of this Temple is greater. God owns all the gold and silver, but He is going to ornate this rebuilt Temple so that its glory will be greater than the former. How is God going to do that? Is God referring to Herod's fantastic remodeling campaign hundreds of years later that made it into the Temple that Jesus visited? No. God had a plan far greater than this that brought eternal consequences.

Fulfillment

We see this fulfillment in two ways.

1) **Christ the Priest** (Haggai 2:10-19)

We firstly see that the Spirit of God raised up Jesus Christ as the new Temple. His death and resurrection enabled a people to come before God in

righteousness forever. Christ is the means by which people can come before God.

"Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (John 2:19).

2) **Christ the King** (Haggai 2:20-23)

We secondly see the greater glory of the Temple will rest in Christ as King. He is the Zerubbabel – the Davidic Prince. He will bring in a new kingdom and will upset every earthly throne.

When we think of this greater glory, we are all the more humbled at how the people went along in their lives ignoring the former Temple in ruins. They had seen a miracle in the restoring of the walls of Jerusalem, but still they could not come around to appreciate the worship of God. They ignored the chief means they could seek out His fellowship and communion.

Man was indifferent, but God was not. Man was content in his sin, but God wanted to save man from His sin. Man did not plan to rebuild the Temple, but it was in God's plans seventy years earlier. And in a true sense, man did not build the Temple, but God's Spirit in him. God really rebuilt the true Temple. This is a picture of what work God would do in the two phases of rebuilding the New Temple of Christ. More of this will be discussed in the following major headings.

Application

We need to be careful in not focusing on properties, buildings, or land. The focus needs to be on Christ, the foundation stone. Everything must be built around Him. It is interesting that all five dates in this book are written with reference to King Darius. The world was built around him. But this New Temple would point to Christ as the new reference point. AD (*anno domini* – the year of the Lord) would be our new focal point. If we glory in anything but Christ, we truly have lost our true focus.

We also are to take great joy and confidence in God's true Temple – the people of God. The Temple is assembled when the local church meets together. It is then the true picture takes place. It is interesting how one stubborn atheist came to know the Lord. Christian communities have their built-in problems because of their isolation from the world. The positive side for them is that one is able to see Christ among them. This lady, a professional lawyer, wanted nothing to do with the Lord until she visited that community one or two nights. She came back and said that is what she wanted and she was immersed into Christ and joined a local congregation.

If the church is materialistic, then people will not see Christ. People will see that they value just what they value – the things of the Earth. But when a people of

God show their fear of Him, but living according to heavenly principles, then they begin to see what the real difference is between a Christian and non-Christian. More than often, it is in the simplicity of life seen in God's people where the glory of God will be seen. Not the soft seats, but the love of God in the member's heart. Not the short sermon, but people who fear the Lord. Not the lush suits, but the ministry to the poor and broken hearted.

How much have we chosen to live in light of God's presence than for our own needs? Has God broken through your religious life to see beyond the walls and mere attendance? Have you taken significant steps to fully comply to what God wants in your life? Are you willing to worship in a broken old church building if God is there in your midst? What do you need to do to get closer to God?

Restoring His Favor Upon Them

God tells us, in somewhat concealed terms, but equally specific and challenging, the full significance of this latter glory. Once the greater glory is mentioned, one can hardly go on speaking about the honor of the first. The honor of the physical Temple is only in that it predicts a greater one. So this last section focuses on the two special significances of this rebuilt Temple. He prophecies and shares the glories of the coming age of the Messiah. More is said about Christ as the New Temple but this is insufficient on its own in a world dominated by earthly kings. Haggai would conclude how the Messiah would also be King. Let us look at these two sections now in somewhat detail.

Christ the Priest (Haggai 2:10-19)

How interesting is it how hard the people of God worked once they agreed to do God's will. The essential problem never is the money. The real problem is not the lack of workers. Nor is the problem the lack of trained workers.

The real problem must always be traced back down to the heart of the people. They are disobedient. This is why we see the exhortation starting in Haggai 2:10 to speak so powerfully.

The message seems rather awkward at first. We first see a ruling from the priests. They are asked whether something holy can be by contact with the holy object make something holy? The question is very insightful. The priests correctly answered, "No."

"If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches bread with this fold, or cooked food, wine, oil, or any other food, will it become holy?" And the priests answered and said, 'No.' (Haggai 2:12)

In this simple answer of "No," the 'magic' of the Temple is put aside. The people are not going to be holy because they have a new holy Temple in their midst.

Instantly, we see all of our holy water, holy charms, holy Bible, etc., cannot make the average man holy. These means of becoming holy are mere vain imaginations of man. Nothing is made holy from holy things. If the holy Temple could not do it, then we should stop thinking that the transfer of holiness is made by touching holy things.

But then, Haggai asks another question.

“Then Haggai said, ‘If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will the latter become unclean?’ And the priests answered and said, ‘It will become unclean.’” (Haggai 2:13)

We again see both an insightful question and answer. If a man is unclean from touching a corpse, what will happen if he touches one of these holy priests? They, of course, will become unclean and need to take their turn in going through a seven-day purification process (Numbers 19:11). The spiritual truth is that which is unclean can make holy people unclean.

Haggai taught them basic spiritual truths from the Old Testament Law. Notice his conclusion in Haggai 2:14:

“Then Haggai answered and said, ‘So is this people. ‘And so is this nation before Me,’ declares the Lord, ‘and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.’”

Haggai seems to bring both of these truths together in one powerful conclusion: ***“Every work of their hands . . . what they offer there is unclean.”*** He is pointing out the need for a real, genuine Temple that serves better than the one they have just made.

#1 The need: They are sinful. They need to be holy.

#1 The problem: They cannot get holy by visiting or even touching the Temple. So how can they become acceptable before God?

#2 The need: Anything that touches the dead is unclean.

#2 The problem: Their flesh is defiled and spiritually dead. Anything they touch to offer is contaminated.

So how can they offer any holy before God?

People are plagued by their uncleanness. Everywhere they go they are reminded of how unacceptable they are before God. Haggai is not just referring to their reluctance in rebuilding the Temple of God but the ongoing problems

after the Temple is rebuilt. They are an unclean people. The things they have offered up are defiled sacrifices. All their service has been defiled.

Haggai is here speaking about the greater glory of the rebuilt Temple. The old Temple just cannot do the needed job. We find all through the Book of Hebrews the theme of the insufficiency of the Old Covenant.

“But when Christ appeared as a High Priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect Tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”
(Hebrews 9:11-14)

Notice the Lord is making a contrast in how He would deal with them. Before by their own works, they would suffer under the curse of the Law.

“I smote you and all the products of your toil with blight and mildew and hail; yet you did not return to Me,” says the Lord.” (Haggai 2:17)

Something special has happened, almost magical though, when the Temple was founded. What happened on that 24th day of the ninth month? This is clearly the day the Temple of the Lord was founded.

“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:” (Haggai 2:18)

Something special happened on that day. In fact, it refers not to the rebuilding of the physical Temple. This is the greater glory that was referred to earlier in 2:5 and 9. Haggai shows us that the physical Temple cannot really meet our spiritual needs. This is why there would be a spiritual Temple that was prefigured in the rebuilding of the old one. The glory of the second one would be greater.

The first time this date is used refers to Christ's first coming and His glorious work on the cross. This was the day that would usher in a day of great blessing. We understand this only by looking back and seeing from John 2:19 that the Temple will be raised up in three days on His resurrection.

“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’” (John 2:19)

We can understand this only to mean that Christ is the true Temple and through His work on the cross and the resurrection the new Temple is erected. He is the means by which we come to God. True holiness and righteousness that enable us to come before God does not originate by touching holy things but from entering God's presence through Christ's work. We are saved through faith in Christ Jesus, not by works. Our works cannot make us holy because we start out with sin.

The same can be said for a Christian's practical righteousness. It only comes through faith in Christ's work. It cannot be done from the flesh. Anything that the flesh touches is corrupted. It cannot bring any holy thing before God. The flesh is the corpse. Anything that comes from the flesh will be corrupted and unacceptable before God. Only those things that come from Christ's work, the Spirit, have life.

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.” (Romans 8:2-5)

We do not want to stretch the Scriptures and yet this seems to be the powerful message here. The blessing of the New Covenant came with Christ's first coming. Christ came humbly without all the fanfare of the glory of the first Temple. He came in the form of man, humble and living a simple life. Yet He accomplished the greatest glory possible. Christ is the Temple of God. He is the means by which we can commune with God and live in His presence. The Gospel age brought this blessing to all who would trust in Christ.

“From this day on I will bless you.” (Haggai 2:19)

The Church, the Temple of God

Perhaps, we should add one more note. The blessing began at the rebuilding of the Temple. There were earlier attempts to rebuilding the Temple but they failed. But this one was sure. Christ is called the Temple.

Christ's body, the church, is also called the Temple of God.

“In whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy Temple in the Lord;” (Ephesians 2:21).

Perhaps this lag of time from when the Temple was being rebuilt and its completion refers to the building up of the body of Christ until its completion. We further see that the building will take a bit longer to build. God's people were to be living stones that formed the Temple. The Spirit of God would make each one of them a stone. The Temple was founded on that one day, but it would take more days to build it.

“And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture: ‘BEHOLD I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER STONE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.’” (1 Peter 2:4-6)

The completion is not mentioned here perhaps to show the indefinite time required for this process. When the elected all come to believe, then the temple will be built in its fullness. The Great Commission will be finally accomplished when the completion of the bride that was purchased by His blood is saved in time.

“I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine; and all things that are Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I have been glorified in them.” (John 17:9-10)

Christ the King (Haggai 2:20-23)

This last section of Haggai starts and ends on the same date. The last time the date is used in Haggai 2:20 shows the word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the same day. Christ would come as the Great Priest (Temple) as is seen in the point above, but the Temple would not have any security in a land where foreign kings ruled. So this last section is a quick confirmation that the greater glory of that house will also give Christ rule over the countries, not only some hearts. Here in Christ alone is the position of the priest combined with the position of king. Christ is both Priest and King and in this sense is Melchizedek.

What does it mean for Christ to be king?

This is briefly described by prophetic language in verses 2:21-23. We first see that the Lord speaks to the political governor. The Lord is going to shake up the heavens and Earth.

“Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the Earth,” (Haggai 2:21).

Remember that the significance of this latter Temple will be much greater than the second. God is going to overthrow all the kingdoms of the Earth. There are many New Testament verses that confirm that this is what is going to happen in the age of the church with Christ's reigning over it as King.

However, before we look for our guns and missiles, we need to understand that the kingdom of God is not of this world. Christ is now king but His kingdom is not of this world. God's kingdom advances through prayer and righteous deeds.

“Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.’” (John 18:36)

In a twist, Zerubbabel is used to represent the Davidic ruler. As a royal descendant, we see that the royal line would continue right to Christ Jesus.

“And after the deportation to Babylon, to Jeconiah was born Shealtiel; and to Shealtiel, Zerubbabel;” (Matthew 1:12).

Christ is God's servant. He is like the seal that is engraved on a ring that is kept right next to the Master. All authority is given to Christ. True comfort is given to the Israelites of Haggai's time by showing them that God had something more and greater in mind than the simple Temple construction that they were working on. Just as Christ's priestly work was humbly done on the cross, so Christ's kingship is hidden behind the scenes for a little while.

Although Christ is Priest and King now, we see that the fullness of these positions is being hidden for a while until all things are fulfilled.

“Whom Heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.” (Acts 3:21)

Application

Clearly we are first instructed to find our holiness not in some Temple that might be here or there but in Christ Himself. When anyone turns from His own life and believes on Jesus Christ, he becomes a new creature in Christ. He enters the new age of blessing. We must refuse to think this blessing is only one of the future. It has to do with the here and now.

Today, the Temple of Christ is being built on the foundation. This is not complete. God has called us to participate in this process of evangelism by which we help others into His kingdom. This is the age of His blessing. We can ask whatever we wish and find that He hears. Christ is truly living in our midst.

However, just as they sought Christ rather than the things that they had, we should also even after believing Christ not seek things but Christ.

“If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on Earth.” (Colossians 3:1-2)

He alone is Lord and will shake all the things that we see. We should not trust what we build up here but instead put our full hope in Christ Who is to come.

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” (Revelation 19:7)

Our purity as His people will depend upon how Christ-focused we will be. If our hearts get involved in things on the Earth, then we will miss the significance of the new Temple.

“And I saw no Temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its Temple.” (Revelation 21:22)

Summary of Theology

We are awed by seeing numerous truths painted so clearly before our eyes by the pen of Haggai.

We see the inability of man to escape his sin and find a way to God. Give man opportunity and the Temple still would not be built. Man is always so preoccupied on his own earthly comforts. God needs to come and build the Temple.

We see the inability of religion even of the highest quality to save man for man at best is a good sinner. He is unclean and all he offers is unclean. He needs a righteousness beyond himself such as is found only in Christ. Man is to repent from his ways and focus on Christ.

We see that the greater glory is in Christ Jesus, both as Priest and King. And yet, the less glorious rebuilt Temple well typifies Christ's earthly ministry. We see the humble service of Christ as He readies Himself for the coming glory in Heaven.

We see Christ as the true Temple. The Temple speaks of all the services necessary to come before God. In summary, Christ is the priest who is able both to offer and to perfectly intercede for His people.

We see Christ as the true King. King Darius and other kings might last a bit. We need to be patient and work under their authority, but they must work under Christ's authority. In time He will reveal His glory.

We see that God is busy building up the Temple, the church at this time. He is preoccupied with making everyone present that should be present. We ought to be diligent in working with Him in this last great work of His before Christ returns.

We see that true blessing comes only when a person comes to the new Temple, that is, Christ. The old things are taken away, behold all things have become new. Blessing is redefined starting with spiritual union with God through Christ but incorporates everything else that we would ever need to complete His will.