INTRODUCTION AND HAGGAI

By Ashby L. Camp

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Introduction

I. Historical Background

A. In 587/586 B.C. the Babylonians completed their conquest of Judah (2 Kings 24:17 - 25:26). They destroyed the temple in Jerusalem that Solomon had built, and for the third time in 18 years (605 B.C. – Daniel; 597 B.C. – Ezekiel), exiled many Jews to Babylonia. This was the punishment of exile that God inflicted on Judah for its persistent rebellion.

B. In 539 B.C., in keeping with the prophecy in Isaiah 44 and 45, the Persian Cyrus entered Babylon and established himself as the king of a new world empire. In his first official year as King of Babylon (538-537 B.C.),[1] he authorized the Jews to return to Palestine and to rebuild their temple (Ezra 1:1-4 and 2 Chron. 36:22-23). He even returned the sacred vessels that

[1] Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 266.

had been seized from the temple by Nebuchadnezzar and agreed to partially finance the reconstruction from the royal treasury.

1. That Cyrus authorized the Jews to return as stated in the Bible was considered false by post-Enlightenment critics because they doubted any sixth-century B.C. ruler would do such a thing. But in 1879 Hormuzd Rassam, an Iranian archaeologist working under the British Museum, discovered in Nineveh a clay cylinder that was inscribed at the direction of Cyrus. It is about ten inches long and five inches wide and is written in the Akkadian language.

2. Cyrus does not specifically mention Judah, but he there reports how he returned cult images (idols) to their former sanctuaries, established permanent sanctuaries for them, and returned the former inhabitants to the lands of the various gods. Cyrus credits his god Marduk with selecting him and giving him the task of ruling the world, but he is, of course, God's instrument even though he does not know God (Isa. 44:28 – 45:6).[2]

C. It naturally took some time for the exiles to prepare to return. They had to sell property, fulfill obligations, and make travel plans. The first group of Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, and Joshua.[3] Both Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel were descendants of David,[4] and Sheshbazzar served as the first governor of the small Persian province called "Yehud," which consisted of Jerusalem and roughly the 15 miles around it.[5]

D. During that first year of their return they set up the altar in its former place and resumed the offering of sacrifices amid the temple ruins (Ezra 3:1-6). The following year, they began construction of a new temple (Ezra 3:8-10; "laid the foundation"), but then opposition from the local residents and neighboring communities, especially the Samaritans, caused the work to grind to a halt. According to Ezra 4:4-5: "Then the peoples around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building. They hired counselors to work against them and frustrate their plans during the entire reign of Cyrus king of Persia and down to the reign of Darius king of Persia."

E. At some point after the return, Zerubbabel replaced Sheshbazzar as governor. The temple was still in ruins in 520 B.C. when the prophets Haggai and Zechariah delivered their oracles. This is early in the reign of king Darius.

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[2] The use of Yahweh, God of heaven, and God of Israel in the decree in Ezra 1:1-3 is explainable if the decree was in response to a petition by the Jews. It was Persian policy at that time to use the title of the god or gods recognized by the local population. See, e.g., H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 11-12. Using this terminology does not mean Cyrus was a convert.

[3] See Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul* (St. Louis: Concordia House Publishing, 2011), 186-188.

[4] Sheshbazzar is called "the prince of Judah" in Ezra 1:8; the name is probably a variant of Shenazzar who is named in 1 Chron. 3:18 as one of the sons of Jeconiah. Zerubbabel was the grandson of Jeconiah, either the son of Pediah (1 Chron. 3:18) or the son of Shealtiel (Ezra 3:2). Finegan, 267.

[5] John Kessler, "Haggai, Book of" in Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 303.

II. The Prophet

Haggai was a prophet, an authoritative messenger of God. He is identified as such repeatedly in the Book of Haggai and in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14. But we have no biographical information on him. Nothing is said of his ancestry or the circumstances of his birth, life, or death.

III. Audience and Date

Haggai delivered five messages to the returned exiles in Jerusalem in 520 B.C. The first and last three are dated to the precise day whereas the second is dated between August 29 and September 21 of 520 B.C.

The Text

I. Call to Work on the Temple and the People's Response (1:1-12)

A. Prophet's call to work on the temple (1:1-11)

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 the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest: [2] "Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD." [3] Then the word of the LORD came by the hand of 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 your ways. [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 does so to put them into a bag with holes. [7] Thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. [8] Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the LORD. [9] You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the LORD of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself 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 on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors."

1. The date of the first prophetic message translates to August 29, 520 B.C. This is some 15 years after the work on the temple had ceased. The prophet Haggai delivers the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, who was then the governor of Judah, and Joshua, the high priest. Verse 2 points out that the prevailing sentiment among the people of Jerusalem was that the time was not right for rebuilding the Lord's temple. They did not doubt the necessity of rebuilding it or their obligation to do so; they simply were convinced that their present circumstances justified postponement of the task.

2. The people apparently believed that they could not afford to rebuild the temple. As 1:6 makes clear, they had not been able to accumulate any wealth. All their efforts to achieve a "comfortable" lifestyle that would "free them" to undertake the rebuilding had failed. When their ship came in, then it would be time to build the temple.

3. You find variations of this attitude in the church. We have the same tendency to put off the things we know the Lord wants us to do until what we perceive to be a more suitable or convenient time.

a. When we get a raise or find a better job or pay off some debts, we will get around to giving financially to Christ-glorifying causes as the Lord would have us give.

b. When our hours at work change or when school gets out or when the kids get older, we will get around to studying the Bible and praying regularly to God.

c. When we get more secure in our job or in our relationship with our friends, we will get around to speaking to our co-workers or to our friends about Jesus Christ.

d. When other demands on our time and energy subside, we will get around to being involved in the church and serving people as we know we should.

4. In v. 4 the Lord makes clear that what the Jews had convinced themselves was a valid reason for putting off the Lord's work was simply an excuse for unfaithfulness. Despite their difficult economic situation, they had found the time and resources for completing and possibly even decorating or expanding their own homes! It is not a matter of time and money but a matter of priorities. They simply cared more about themselves than about obeying God. If they had been living in the temple, it would have been built long ago.

5. In fact, they had gotten matters completely backward. Their lack of material blessings was not a reason for them to put off building the temple; it was a *result* of their having done so! The very hardship they were using to justify their procrastination was God's discipline

to bring them to repentance. He makes clear in 1:9 that they lacked the blessing of material abundance because he was preventing it (he "blew it away") in response to their neglect of his temple.

6. He says in vv. 10-11, *"Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. [11] And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors."* He says in 2:17, "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."

a. As we see in texts like Heb. 12:4-11 and 1 Cor. 11:27-32, God in his love still disciplines his people. Now, we know from Job and elsewhere that not all suffering or hardship is divine discipline. It does not always mean God is trying to move us to repentance. He has other reasons for allowing it, and oftentimes we, like Job, are not privy to those reasons.

b. But if we are *living in sin*, accepting conduct we know deep down is wrong and suppressing that conviction to continue in the sin, we need to recognize suffering and hardship that comes into our lives as discipline, as God calling us to repentance. In other words, if it is discipline, we will know the sin involved with minimal introspection. It will be something we have harbored and excused rather than renounced and struggled against. If you are not aware of any such area of rebellion, do not turn every hardship into discipline and torture yourself trying to guess what it could be. Accept in that case that your suffering was not discipline but something God called you to endure for some other reason.

7. They needed to reverse their priorities. In the words of Christ, they needed to seek first God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things would be given to them as well. Our highest priority must always be to do the will of God. Everything else flows from that.

B. The people's favorable response (1:12)

[12] 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 feared the LORD.

1. The leaders and the people obeyed the message of the Lord that had been delivered by the prophet Haggai. They did not resist his word but submitted to his assessment of their lives. They now saw what they had done in the right perspective, and they feared what they deserved from the Lord. We must never allow the grace of God to cause us to take sin lightly, to cause us to think that it is not really deserving of judgment.

2. This shows us how important it is to expose our hearts to the word of God. If we listen to our own voice, we rarely will condemn ourselves, as we are experts at rationalizing and justifying our unfaithfulness. It is like the movie scene where the delirious person gets slapped and says, "Thanks, I needed that." We need the truth of God, which leads to blessed repentance.

3. Their obedience at this point presumably took the form of their going up to the hills to gather the wood for the building project as mentioned in v. 8 and possibly other building materials. It appears from vv. 14-15 that the actual work on the temple did not begin until 23 days later, on September 21, 520 B.C.

II. God's Encouraging Word (1:13-15)

> **13 Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, "I am with you, declares the LORD." 14 And 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, 15 on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.**

A. When the people, in conviction of their sin, repented in fear of the Lord and expressed that repentance in their obedience, their beginning to gather the building material, the Lord encouraged and reassured them. He declared to them, "I am with you." What sweet words to those who had turned away, who had turned their eyes to their own things and away from the things of God. There is no moral quarantine, no probation period after their repentance. When they turned back to God, he embraced them fully and will be active in their obedience.

B. This verbal confirmation of God's mercy given to them in their reconciliation "stirred up" the spirits of the leaders and the people. It energized and empowered them for the task and strengthened their resolve to follow through on their repentance. The more we recognize and appreciate the greatness and mercy of God, the more zealously we will serve him.

III. Encouragement in the Face of Seeming Insignificance of Their Efforts (2:1-9)

A. Exhortation in the face of discouragement (2:1-5)

> **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: 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? [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.

1. On October 17, 520 B.C., 26 days after they had begun the actual work on the temple, Haggai delivered another message from the Lord. This was the seventh or last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-34).

2. In 2:3 God has Haggai voice what was in the hearts of some of the people. The temple they had been working on for the last month seemed to them like nothing. It became increasingly obvious that what they were building compared so unfavorably to what had existed in the past that it threatened to weaken their commitment to persevere. They could not pay skilled craftsmen as Solomon had done, and they could not embellish the temple with gold.

a. Alec Motyer comments, "Work had been started on the temple site, and the people were beginning to sense the huge task they had undertaken and how little they might expect to achieve. It was all very depressing."[6] Indeed, Ezra 3:12 indicates that some of the old people who had seen Solomon's temple that was destroyed decades earlier wept when they saw the difference. That is why God tells them all in v. 4 to "be strong." Some were starting to feel in their hearts that it just was not worth it; why pour effort into building a merely second-rate temple?

b. In the span of about four weeks, the people went from having their spirits stirred by God, from being zealous for the task, to being disheartened. That is a microcosm of life. We struggle to maintain our zeal for the things of God against ever changing situations, circumstances, and perceptions. One day we are on the mountaintop rejoicing in his glory, and later his presence, greatness, and will have been pushed to the edge of our minds, overwhelmed by the immediacy of life.

c. And that is especially true when reality clashes with our expectations and perceptions. These people were "fired up" for building the temple, which they envisioned as a great structure suitable as a "dwelling" for God Almighty, but when the realization hit home about how plain and simple it would be in comparison to what stood before they were tempted to give up. In other words, they were tempted to allow the frustration of their own vision to cause them to revert to the disobedience of which they had just been convicted and repented.

d. God told them to bring the wood and build the house (1:8). He did not call them to build a structure beyond their means and ability. And yet, they allowed their own ideas and

[6] J. Alec Motyer, "Haggai" in Thomas Edward McComiskey, ed., *The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 3:987.

expectations to become a source of discouragement. It was not what *they* wanted, what *they* envisioned, so it cannot be worth doing.

e. We experience this same temptation as disciples of Christ in trying to carry out the work the Lord has given us.

(1) The heart has been taken from many a preacher, teacher, elder, and deacon who began to feel his labor for Christ, his effort to evangelize or to strengthen and build up believers in the faith, was not going to produce the effect he wanted or expected. When we focus on the results we expect or imagine our labor will produce rather than on being faithful in the work itself, we are more vulnerable to discouragement.

(2) Christian husbands and wives are tempted to give up on the work of being the husband and wife God calls them to be, on loving each other sacrificially, when they begin to think that the difficult work of crucifying the flesh is not going to yield the marriage they imagined. They abandon the work God calls them to do and plunge the marriage into death spiral of selfishness.

(3) Brothers and sisters in Christ are tempted to give up on the work of growing spiritually – doing the work of regularly studying God's word and praying and being actively involved in the church – when they begin to feel their effort is not going to result in their being the spiritual person they wanted or expected to be. When they start to feel their labor will yield only mediocre growth, the thought creeps in "then why break a sweat?"

3. In the face of this potentially debilitating perspective that their obedience to God is not going to produce the results they desire or imagine, God commands them to have the courage to carry on with the work. When their view of the future threatens to deflate completely their enthusiasm for the task, they must "be strong." They cannot allow the specter of insignificance or mediocrity to pull them from being faithful in the God-given task.

4. They must continue to trust that God knows what he is doing. He is not like an incompetent employer who assigns meaningless work because he does not know what he is doing. The very fact he called them to do it means that it is meaningful, that he has a purpose or reason for it, even if that purpose or reason is not apparent to them.

5. To reinforce that truth, God reminds them that, despite how things may seem, he is *with them*. He is present in a special way; he is interested and involved in the project he called them to undertake. He did not lay that task on them for no reason and then abandon them to their irrelevant, pointless labor. His presence is testimony to and confirmation of the significance of the effort, and for that reason, he tells them at the end of v. 5 not to fear. They are not to fear that what they are doing has no significance or meaning simply because it appears *to them* to have no significance or meaning.

B. A basis for encouragement (2:6-9)

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.'"

1. Herbert Wolf says these verses are "probably the most difficult portion of the book,"[7] so an extra dose of humility and caution are in order. As I understand these verses, God offers encouragement for their being strong and not fearing. He explains ("For") that he will turn their meager efforts into much more than they can imagine. In his sovereignty, he will use their seemingly insignificant efforts for his purposes and glory; he will take them up and magnify them.

a. It is said of God's dramatic intervention on behalf of Israel in the days of the exodus from Egypt that "the earth shook" (Ps. 68:8), and Israel's return from Babylonian exile is depicted by Isaiah as a new or second exodus. It is described in imagery drawn from the exodus (Isa. 11:15-16, 43:16-21, 48:20-21, 52:11-12), so one is justified in viewing it as a time when the earth again shook in reaction to God's dramatic intervention on behalf of his people. In both of those "earth-shaking" releases from captivity, the Israelites were given silver, gold, and goods by their non-Jewish neighbors (Ex. 3:21 and 12:35; Ezra 1:4 [possibly refers only to Jews]).[8]

b. I think God is here encouraging the Jews by revealing that he will soon supply them with gold and silver from the pagan nations, which they can use to embellish the temple. He refers figuratively to that coming intervention on their behalf as his again shaking all of creation to remind them of how he provided them gold and silver in his recent, "earth-shaking work" of freeing them from Babylonian captivity. He wants them to associate the promised provision with the provision given in conjunction with their recent exodus that they might be assured of its fulfillment. He is seeking to strengthen and encourage them.

c. He also may refer to his upcoming provision of gold and silver as his shaking all of creation because he wants them to see that promised provision as a foreshadowing of his ultimate creation-shaking intervention at the end time. Isaiah 60:1-12 pictures that end time as one in which the wealth of the nations is offered to God by flowing to Israel.

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[7] Herbert M. Wolf, *Haggai and Malachi* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), 33.

[8] D. J. Clines states in *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 38, "The natural sense is that Cyrus required his non-Jewish subjects to help provide for the returning exiles money, food, and transport, together with offerings for the Jewish temple (cf. NEB, 'every remaining Jew . . . may claim aid from his neighbours')." See also, Ralph W. Klein, "The Books of Ezra & Nehemiah" in Leander E. Keck, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 3:678.

d. Ezra 5 reports that when the Jews began rebuilding the temple in response to the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah, Tattenai, the governor of a neighboring province, challenged their authority to undertake the construction. He reported their activity to King Darius along with their claim that construction of the temple had been authorized some 18 years earlier by King Cyrus. He suggested that Darius search the records, no doubt anticipating he would find that no such authorization had been granted.

e. Darius located the decree of Cyrus and then wrote the following to governor Tattenai (Ezra 6:6-12):

> 6 "Now therefore, Tattenai, governor of the province Beyond the River, Shethar-
> bozenai, and your associates the governors who are in the province Beyond the
> River, keep away. 7 Let the work on this house of God alone. Let the governor of the
> Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site. 8 Moreover, **I**
> **make a decree** regarding what you shall do for these elders of the Jews for the
> rebuilding of this house of God. **The cost is to be paid to these men in full and**
> **without delay from the royal revenue, the tribute of the province from Beyond**
> **the River**. 9 And whatever is needed-- bulls, rams, or sheep for burnt offerings to the
> God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, or oil, as the priests at Jerusalem require-- let that
> be given to them day by day without fail, 10 that they may offer pleasing sacrifices to
> the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons. 11 Also I make a
> decree that if anyone alters this edict, a beam shall be pulled out of his house, and he
> shall be impaled on it, and his house shall be made a dunghill. 12 May the God who
> has caused his name to dwell there overthrow any king or people who shall put out a
> hand to alter this, or to destroy this house of God that is in Jerusalem. I Darius make
> a decree; let it be done with all diligence."

f. The following year (518 B.C.), Darius brought a large army through Judah in route to pacifying a rebellion in Egypt. Though there is no record of it, it is quite possible that the Persian Empire gave money to Judah as a politically expedient gesture of goodwill for using Judah as a base of operations against Egypt.[9] Given Darius's recent decree regarding the temple, it is conceivable that funds were earmarked for that project.

g. In 458 B.C., when Ezra came to Jerusalem from Babylon, King Artaxerxes and his counselors contributed silver and gold for the temple and permitted contributions from the inhabitants of Babylon (Ezra 7:15). So the influx of pagan treasures that God provided shortly after Haggai's prophecy was repeated through the years as an intermittent extension of the promise.

h. Beginning in 19 B.C., in the days of King Herod the Great, which was after the Romans had become the dominant power in the Mediterranean world, the temple was

[9] See Andrew E. Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: 2012), 81-82.

enlarged and embellished into a spectacular structure.[10] John 2:20 records that at that time the temple had been under construction for 46 years. According to Josephus (*Ant*. 15.380), it was not completed until 63 A.D. He called it "a structure more noteworthy than any under the sun" (*Ant*. 15.412), which is consistent with its buildings being described as "magnificent" in Mk. 13:1. Herod was an Edomite by birth, not a Jew, but his father had converted to Judaism in the second century B.C. According to Josephus, Herod paid for the massive temple renovation from his own funds,[11] and since he was a foreigner, it was gold and silver coming to the temple from the nations.

2. In addition to the promised pagan funding for material embellishment of the temple, God also promises that he will at some unspecified time fill that house with a glory that exceeds the glory of Solomon's temple. Here he moves beyond material splendor to the glory Christ will bestow on the embellished temple by his presence and teaching in its courts.

a. John says of Jesus in Jn. 1:14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Referring to the event on the mountain of transfiguration, Luke reports in Lk. 9:32, "Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him."

b. The presence of the Lord Jesus, God Incarnate, at the temple bestowed on it an even greater glory than did the manifestation of divine glory that once filled Solomon's temple as reported in 2 Chron. 7:1-3. Jesus said in Mat. 12:6, "I tell you, something greater than the temple is here." Though his coming changed worship so as to render the temple obsolete (Jn. 4:19-24), as God in the flesh and the centerpiece, the pivot point, of salvation history, his acknowledgement of the temple as his Father's house (Lk. 2:49; Jn. 2:16) and his being consumed with zeal for that house when he cleansed it (Jn. 2:15-17) was the ultimate exaltation of it.

3. In this place, probably meaning Jerusalem,[12] he will give peace. In fact, "Jerusalem" means "city of peace." This is where the great divine work that brings peace, that reconciles to God all that will be reconciled, was accomplished in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

a. The multitude of angels that praised God at the birth of Christ proclaimed in Lk. 2:14, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth *peace* among those with whom he is pleased!" Paul says in Rom. 5:1, "Therefore, having been pronounced righteous from faith, we have *peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . .*"

b. When the resurrected Jesus stood before the apostles in Luke 24, he said (v. 36; see also, Jn. 20:19-26:), "*Peace* to you!" Verses 45-47 state: "Then he opened their minds to

[10] See Leen & Kathleen Ritmeyer, *Jerusalem: The Temple Mount* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2015), 23-31.
[11] Duane W. Roller, *The Building Program of Herod the Great* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 121.
[12] Wolf, 39.

understand the Scriptures, [46] and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, [47] and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, *beginning from Jerusalem*.'" This works ends in the ultimate peace of the eschaton.

4. If God can take up the apparently insignificant labor of the Jews and magnify and use it for his purposes in history, we need to stop judging the value of our efforts in terms of what we can see. Keep serving God faithfully and do not grow weary of doing good. Know that he can take the most discouraging of results and use them to his glory in ways we cannot imagine.

IV. Blessing in Rededication (2:10-19)

A. The need for repentance (2:10-14)

[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, [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." [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." [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.

1. On December 18, 520, two months after his previous sermon and some three months after they had begun the actual work on the temple, Haggai delivered another message from the Lord, this one directed to the priests. His contemporary, the prophet Zechariah, had begun his ministry a few weeks earlier in November 520 B.C. (Zech. 1:1).

2. In the sacrificial system, animal flesh was sanctified or made holy by being offered in sacrifice by the priests (e.g., Lev. 6:17, 25; 7:1). Hill writes:

> Portions of the sacrificial animal were sometimes carried in the folds of the priestly robes for presentation to the Lord as a wave offering (Num. 6:20), as a meal for the priest(s) (Lev. 6:26), or as a fellowship meal (Lev. 7:15). The garment of the priest was made holy or consecrated by virtue of the contact with the sacrificial offering, but that holiness was not transferable should the priest's robe touch other objects (Lev. 6:27).[13]

[13] Hill, 87.

3. So the priests naturally and correctly acknowledge that fact. In contrast, something that is defiled or rendered unclean (ritually impure) by contact with an unclean object spreads its acquired uncleanness to other objects it contacts. For example, "ritual defilement as a result of contact with a corpse was passed on by further touch, like a contagious disease (cf. Lev. 11:28; 22:4-7)."[14] The priests acknowledge that fact in v. 13.

4. In v. 14 God says that this principle applies to the people of Judah. Their "uncleanness" defiles, makes unacceptable, whatever they do in service or worship of him. He is explaining that their material lack (note following verses), which he indicated in 1:6, 9-11 was his discipline for their not having built his temple despite having built their own paneled houses, had a deeper cause. Their not building his temple was a symptom of their lack of submission to him, which he characterizes here as "uncleanness" because it made their service and worship unacceptable.

5. They presumed the holiness of the priests or temple would sanctify their offerings thus putting them in good standing and therefore in expectation of his blessings, but in fact the defilement of their hearts made all their offerings unacceptable. As David wrote in Ps. 51:17, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." Without that they had no reason to expect blessings from God.

6. Nothing that a rebel, a person with a defiant heart, offers to God is acceptable to him. This same point was made centuries before in Amos 5:21-24. If your heart is not surrendered to God, you do not please him by coming to church or giving money or taking communion or praying or studying the Bible. All acts of devotion offered by a rebel are a mockery of God.

B. The blessing of repentance (2:15-19)

15 Now then, consider from this day onward. Before stone was placed upon 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 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. 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."

[14] Hill, 88.

1. God reminds them of the hardships, the lack of blessing, they faced because of their hearts had strayed, as manifested in their "passive rebellion" of neglecting his temple. He struck their crops, withheld his abundance, but they refused to take the message and turn to him.

2. He then promises them a new day in light of their repentance. Having turned, as evidenced by their rebuilding of the temple, God promises them his future blessings. In contrast to how things had been, he declares, "But from this day on I will bless you." Though the harvest is still months away, it being December, he declares he is going to bless them, which in this context means with a bumper crop. Repentance is always the path to blessing.

V. Zerubbabel, God's Signet Ring (2:20-23)

> **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 [going] to shake the heavens and the earth, 22 and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I [will] 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. 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 signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of hosts."**

A. This is the second message delivered by Haggai on December 18, 520 B.C. It is addressed to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, who is the son of David's descendant Shealtiel. Both of these men are named in the lineages of Jesus given in Matthew (1:12-13) and Luke (3:27).

B. Verses 21-22 picture an earth-shaking, divine intervention that overthrows or supplants the kingdoms of the world. I think this refers to the coming of Christ in the time of the Roman Empire. As Daniel had revealed in interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2, in the days of the kings of the fourth kingdom (Dan. 2:44), the days of the Roman Empire, God was going to establish his eternal kingdom which would bring to an end "all these kingdoms," meaning all human kingdoms, all worldly political governing powers as symbolized by the statue made up of succeeding expressions of that governing power.

1. The kingdom that Christ inaugurated in the first century A.D. will culminate at his return in the perfect, all-encompassing reality of love and fellowship in the immediate presence of God. The Messianic kingdom that comes as a small stone that strikes the feet of the statue ultimately will result in a great and all-encompassing reality. In the words of Dan. 2:35, it becomes a great mountain and fills the whole earth.

2. It is in this sense that the kingdom of God that Christ inaugurated spelled the end of all worldly kingdoms. The end has begun, has broken into the present age, and we await only its final expression. Jesus made this point in a number of parables: the growing seed in Mk. 4:26-29; the mustard seed in Mat. 13:31-32, Mk. 4:30-32, Lk. 13:18-19; the leaven in Mat. 13:33, Lk. 13:20-21; and the wheat and the weeds in Mat. 13:24-30, 36-43. To quote just one scholar regarding Paul's perspective on the matter, Michael Bird states in *Introducing Paul* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 114, 116:

> Fundamental to Paul's theology is that the future age (the eschaton) has already broken in and has been *inaugurated* through the life, death and resurrection of the Son of God. . . .
>
> The coming of Jesus has inaugurated a new era of redemptive history and God's new age has been launched upon the world, something like a covert operation seizing key nodes along the rear echelons of an opposing force. Those people who confess faith in the Messiah and experience the transforming power of the Spirit of God are living billboards in our global metropolis advertising God's activity in the world and pointing to things soon to come. At the same time, the old age continues, death and evil are realities that need to be confronted and endured, but their power has been broken in principle and even in practice. What is more, the day is coming when God will finally do away with them and the old age will be no more. On that day God will be 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28).

C. Here, as in Mal. 3:1-5, we have the prophetic fusion of Christ's coming and his coming again. His work is a unity that was seen as one piece in the prophetic vision.

1. The ESV and a few other translations understand the participle "shaking" as implying the action would be taken soon, but many others do not read that implication into it. They instead render it simply as "I will shake" (KJV, ERV, ASV, REB, NKJV, NAB) or "I am going to shake" (NAS, NASU, NJB, NIV, HCSB, CSB). If the prophet was indeed suggesting the action would be taken soon, it should be viewed as a case of prophetic "telescoping" or "foreshortening," meaning the prophet speaks of what is distant as though it were near.

2. As J. Barton Payne states, "Biblical prophecy may leap from one prominent peak in predictive topography to another, without notice of the valley between, which may involve no inconsiderable lapse in chronology."[15] Robert Shank says, "The prophetic perspective is a 'foreshortened perspective' . . . whereby future events are seen as near at hand or already present, though in fulfillment they may prove to be centuries removed from the prophet's day."[16]

D. The promise to Zerubbabel is made to him as the ancestral representative of Christ. J. Daniel Hays comments, "As a descendant of David and as one who obediently listened to the

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[15] J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 137.
[16] Robert Shank, *Until: The Coming of Messiah and His Kingdom* (Springfield, MO: Westcott Publishers, 1982), 364.

prophetic word of Yahweh, Zerubbabel apparently becomes a foreshadowing type of messianic figure."[17] It is in his glorious descendant that the promise to him is ultimately fulfilled. John Kessler comments:

> The promise to Zerubbabel (Hag 2:23) assured the community that the promise to David (2 Sam 7:14) had not been removed. The NT sees the ultimate fulfillment of that promise in Jesus of Nazareth, the descendant of Zerubbabel (Mt 1:12; Lk 3:27). Furthermore, Hebrews 12:25-28 view Haggai's prophecy of the shaking of the heavens and earth as referring both to the kingdom of which the Christian community was already part and the anticipated Parousia, when it would be consummated.[18]

E. A signet ring was a symbol of royal authority by which a king would seal or endorse official documents. For God to make one "like a signet ring" implies a special and close relationship with him with implications of his authority. Making him *like* a signet ring also may suggest he is the means or instrument by which people come to belong to God, whereas a signet ring was the means or instrument by which things belonging to the king were identified as such.

F. God through Haggai is here making clear that the curse on Jehoiachin (= Coniah; see e.g., NIV) in Jer. 22:28-30, where he declared that none of his offspring would sit on the throne of David, has been reversed. In Jer. 22:24 God said that though Jehoiachin (Coniah) were *the signet ring* on his right hand, he would tear him off. Here he declares he will make Jehoiachin's descendant, Zerubbabel, like a signet ring, clearly echoing that prior curse.

1. There is evidence that Jehoiachin had repented, and presumably the removal of the generational curse was in response to that. Jeremiah reports in Jer. 52:31-34 (see also 2 Ki. 25:27-30) the special favor that was shown to Jehoiachin after decades in prison. This striking reversal of circumstances suggests a change of Jehoiachin's heart. Rabbinic literature is filled with references to Jehoiachin's repentance and his subsequent restoration.[19]

2. Another possibility is that the curse of Jer. 22:28-30 applied only to Jehoiachin and his immediate descendants. Here is how Brown argues the point:

> A command is given (v. 30) in the pl. (*kitbu*, write!) to record that he will be *'ariri*, childless (see Gen. 15:2, and note esp. Lev. 20:20-21, where being *'ariri* is a curse for an unauthorized union), yet v. 28 spoke of his offspring while 1 Ch 3:16-17 states that he had seven sons. The explanation for this is found in the rest of v. 30, which should be understood in light of the presumed ardent hope and desire of the people of Judah -- in their land and in exile – that this son of David,

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[17] J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 359.
[18] John Kessler, "Haggai, Book of" in Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 305-306.
[19] See, e.g., Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus Vol. 4* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 100-102.

or one of his sons, would be restored to the throne. God says it will not happen, the emphasis being on "his lifetime" (in which he'll not succeed) and the lifetimes of this sons, none of whom would reign on the throne, making it as if he was childless (so NIV). In keeping with this, the divine promises to the line of David are not renewed until the days of Zerubbabel, his grandson (see Hag 2:20-23, and . . . Jer 52:31-34).[20]

G. Joyce Baldwin says in the final paragraph of her commentary on Haggai:

Haggai continues to call God's people to zealous service. Half-hearted allegiance is no allegiance. To think that any time will do to become serious about His cause is to fail Him completely. He is waiting to bless, but He cannot do so while His people are apathetic and self-centered. Moreover, in this mood they experience only shortfall, whereas He wants to shower them with good things. Haggai's remedy for today, as for his own day, is a church mobilized for action, to which he would say, 'Take courage, work, fear not.' God's future purpose will be achieved and will prove to be more glorious in fulfillment than in prospect by the degree to which Jesus Christ was more glorious than the Temple.[21]

[20] Brown, 98.
[21] Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 55.