

November 27

Scriptures: Read Haggai 1

Key Verse: “Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Consider your ways!’” (Haggai 1:7)

Overview

After the Lord had so graciously brought the remnant back from the Babylonian captivity, just as He had promised, one might think that they would have been so grateful that their first priority would be to completely rebuild the Lord’s Temple (it had been utterly destroyed by the Babylonians and left in ruins for many years), yet such was not the case. The Jews in Jerusalem had allowed circumstances to stop them from their spiritual duties. They put the Lord’s work aside while they selfishly attended to the construction of their own lavish homes. The Spirit of the Lord moved upon Haggai to address this problem of apathy and indifference among the people.

His message from God was to be directed to the civil leader, the governor (prince of Judah) Zerubbabel, and the religious leader, the High Priest Joshua, whose father (or forefather) was Jehozadak (or Jozadak; Ezra 3:2; I Chron. 6:15). These men had been appointed by King Cyrus of Persia, who conquered Babylon and who made the decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland. These men were also from the rightful families to hold those positions, and therefore the people respected their leadership. If God could motivate them into action, then they could lead the people in the work of rebuilding. Zerubbabel, whose Hebrew name means “born in Babylon” (his Chaldean name being “Sheshbazzar”; Ezra 1:8, 11), was the great-grandson of King Jehoiachin (Jeconiah; 1 Chron. 3:17-19), the second to last king who reigned in Judah (he was carried captive to Babylon, 2 Kings 24:8-17; 25:27-30).

The people of Jerusalem who had returned from The Exile had made an excuse for not working on the Temple, saying, “The time has not come” (1:2). They may have said this because of the opposition that they had received from some of the heathen inhabitants of the land. These heathens had deceitfully obtained an order from Cyrus’ successor, Artaxerxes, for the Jews to stop all repairs to the city (cf. Ezra 4:21-24). If the Jews had been determined, however, they could have contested this order. According to the Law of the Persians, a king’s decree could not be changed, in which case Cyrus’ decree which permitted the restoration of Jerusalem was not to be altered. Darius, the next king, discovered this error and, in the providence of God, gave the Jews the official “go ahead” (Ezra 5 and 6).

Even before they received this official notification, however, the Lord had stirred up the people because of Haggai’s exhortation (along with that of Zechariah), and they all resumed the rebuilding of the Temple after it had been lying unfinished for about 16 years. In his exhortation, Haggai told them the reason they had not experienced the blessing of God upon their fields and finances. They had put their own interests ahead of the interests of God. God desired them to build His Temple and thereby bring glory to Him (1:8). By leaving His dwelling in ruins, they were not honouring God. When believers today do not work to build up the Kingdom of God by pointing the lost to Jesus, and when they do not support or participate in the work of the Lord (the local church and other outreach ministries) then this also does not bring glory to God. Our

faithful service to Him and fulfilling His desires should be our primary concern. Many people today are guilty of the same thing for which Haggai rebuked the people of Jerusalem in his day. There was nothing wrong with working hard in their fields or building fine homes; what was wrong was that they did these things while neglecting their duty to the Lord. Their priorities were out of order, and thus the Lord's displeasure was upon them. For this reason, they had not been blessed in their work or income.

God's word to them was, "Consider your ways!" (1:5, 7); this must also be heeded by everyone in every generation, for the Lord takes all our ways, motives, and thoughts into account. Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all the remnant listened to and respected Haggai's message. They did consider their ways and changed them, and once they did, the Lord's Spirit energized and enabled them to carry out their goal, knowing that His presence was with them (1:12-15). Along with God's presence in their midst came His blessings as well. By obeying God and heeding the voice of Haggai, God's messenger, the people were restored to a place of favour with Him.

Prayer

Lord, direct us in reading and studying "Your Word, that we may learn to obey You and, as a result, experience Your presence and blessing in our lives. May our lives be a witness to those around us of Your goodness.