

November 28

Scriptures: Read Haggai 2

Key Verse: "... 'be strong ... and work; for I am with you,' says the Lord of hosts."
(Haggai 2:4)

Overview

Haggai's message in chapter two was given about one and a half months after his first message (ch. 1), and almost one month after the people of Jerusalem had begun to collect materials for the Temple. It was the last day of the seven-day celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, which commemorated their wilderness experience after the Lord mightily delivered them from Egypt (3:1; Lev. 23:34-43). During this time of remembrance, the oldest people in the congregation were likely saddened as they remembered the glories of Solomon's beautiful Temple that had been destroyed seventy years earlier by the Babylonians (cf. their reaction some years earlier when the foundations were laid; Ezra 3:12-13). The Lord's care and concern for the feelings of these elderly ones are evident in His question which voiced their low opinion of the new Temple under construction (2:3).

In Solomon's day, Israel was in its golden age of prosperity, and they could afford to build the Temple with the most costly and high quality materials, including much silver and gold. Now, however, such materials were not available to these returned exiles. Therefore, it was to be expected that the new Temple would be less beautiful. The Lord, however, did not want the people to get discouraged. His words showed them that He was not as concerned with externals as He was with the condition of their hearts. Even though the new Temple would never reach its former beauty, He assured them that He would still be present there because of their obedience to Him.

After celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles, the people may also have been disappointed that they did not see such manifestations of God's presence as had their forefathers at the time of the Exodus. Yet the Lord comforted and encouraged them by telling them that His Spirit was with them, just as He had been before. There may have been some who were afraid of renewed opposition when the Temple began to be erected, and indeed opposition did come, but God had exhorted the leaders and the people to "be strong". He told them "do not fear!" (2:5). The Lord would intervene so they would not have to stop building. In God's providence, Darius found the decree of Cyrus which not only allowed the Temple to be built but encouraged it (Ezra 5:1-5; 6:1-3).

After God gave the word of assurance that His presence would be with them, another word of encouragement was given based on future events. The shaking up of nations may refer to the drastic political changes that God would make, and His activity in preparation for the Messiah's birth. However, it seems to have its complete fulfillment in an even more distant future — the second coming of the Messiah Jesus. At that time He will be "the Desire of All Nations" and He, the Prince of Peace, will reign over the earth. In that day the glorious Temple (the dwelling place of God) will be made up of the body of believers, with the Lord Himself being the chief

cornerstone. It will be more glorious than any material temple could ever be! (2:7, 9; cf. Eph. 2:19-22; Matt. 12:6).

Two months later, the prophet Haggai had another word from the Lord which would explain to the people why God's blessing, which had been withheld from them in the past, could now be expected. For about sixteen years the people had been sacrificing to the Lord on the altar in the unfinished Temple (cf. Ezra 3:1-3), but because of their disobedience to God all those offerings were done in vain, for they were not acceptable to Him. Haggai illustrated this through the priest's answer to the question concerning the transmittable nature of ceremonial uncleanness (2:11-14). The Lord's displeasure resulted in His withholding of blessings, including their necessities of life. This should have caused them to turn and seek God, but it did not. Now, however, through the prophet Haggai's message, the people obeyed the voice of the Lord and could expect His blessings upon them, which was to be evident in the next season of sowing and reaping (2:15-19).

On that same day, the Lord gave Haggai another prophecy addressed specifically to Zerubbabel. As the ruler over Judah, he may have become worried about how the shaking up of the nations, prophesied earlier (2:6-7), would affect Judah. Once again the Lord reveals how He will intervene in the affairs of men and in the spiritual warfare upon the earth, causing the overthrow of "the throne of kingdoms". Satan is the one on the throne over the kingdoms of this earth, but he and all his followers, who have rejected Jesus Christ, will one day be defeated by the coming Messiah (2:21-22; 2 Thess. 2:8-12). Haggai's prophecy in verse 23 refers to the Messiah, and yet he addresses Zerubbabel, the descendant of King David, and gives him great honour. The reason for this is that his descendant would be Jesus the Messiah (Matt. 1:12-13; Luke 3:27), the hope of the world. Zerubbabel, then, was called the Lord's signet ring, signifying something precious and authoritative, for he was a guarantee that the Messiah would surely come.

Prayer

Dear Father, we long to see the return of the Messiah, when He will reign over the earth as the Prince of Peace. We as believers will be a part of the glorious Temple in which the Lord Himself will be the Chief Cornerstone.