

THE COMING OF ZION'S REDEEMER

THE PROPHECIES OF HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH,
AND MALACHI

RONALD HANKO



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This book is dedicated to my children,
who by the grace of God have been and continue to be
committed to the work of building Christ's church
both in their own families
and in the congregations to which they belong
while they wait for the return
of Zion's Redeemer.

*And the Redeemer shall come to Zion,
and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob,
saith the LORD.*

—Isaiah 59:20

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Foreword

Pastor Hanko's commentaries on the books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are written not mainly *to be referred to* while seeking an answer to some challenging biblical question, but more particularly *to be read and assimilated* by believers who seek greater understanding of God's word. Two of the commentaries were initially published serially by the *Standard Bearer* and thus were set forth to be read, albeit incrementally. The other commentary is published here for the first time but is written in the same readable style.

The full commentary on each book may be read with great profit by virtue of the author's trained, experienced, and studied insights. Three perspectives stand out: first, a living picture of Judah in the generation following the return from the Babylonian captivity with her special charge to reform true worship of God; next, a sharp delineation of the truth that these ancient prophecies especially have direct and significant application to us as the church today; and finally, a humble bowing in living fearfulness before the one only true God of heaven and earth, Jehovah of the scriptures, who sovereignly carries out his absolute rule over all to its culmination in the unconditional, covenantal salvation of his church, all to his own honor and glory alone.

One simple acknowledgment should be made related to the author himself. He was called to the pastoral and missionary ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches thirty-five years ago, and it pleased God to raise him up on the shoulders of a paternal grandfather now in heaven after following a lifelong commitment to that same ministry, and on those of a father who, now in a kind of "restless retirement," surely from time to time glances back on his own life calling as a pastor and professor in these same churches. This is a remarkable manifestation of God's covenantal faithfulness through the generations and adds unusual depth to these commentaries.

JOEL SUGG

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and former parishioner of the author

Preface

The last three prophets of the Old Testament have always intrigued me, living and working as they did in the latter days of that Testament, with the first coming of Christ just over the horizon of history. Their messages individually and together seemed very pertinent to the last days in which we live, with Christ's coming again very near. Closer study of the three prophecies has reinforced my belief that the message they bring is intended for and needed in the last days of the New Testament.

In addition, the prophecies of Haggai and Malachi attracted me by their wonderful prophecies of the coming of Christ and by their vivid language. Zechariah's difficult and sometimes obscure symbolism was also intriguing, as were its obvious similarities to Revelation, although the similarities were much greater than ever I realized before studying the book.

The work on the prophecies of Haggai and Malachi began with a series of sermons on those books, and the work of Zechariah followed as a matter of course and by way of completing a study of these three books.

May God bless and use these feeble efforts that only touch on the glory of Christ, the desire of all nations, the great priest-king and the messenger of the covenant. He, Zion's redeemer, is the one for whom we are still waiting.

Introduction

The three prophecies of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi form a unit, not only because these three and they alone are the prophets of the restoration, that is, of Judah's return from exile in Babylon, but also because they have the same general theme and purpose. That one great purpose is the preparation of God's covenant people for the coming of Christ.

In the days of Haggai and Zechariah that long-awaited event was five hundred years in the future; in Malachi's day it was even closer. While waiting for Christ's coming, the covenant people had to learn to look away from the Old Testament types to the fulfillment of all the types in him who was promised. Each of these three prophecies, in its own way, taught them to do that.

Thus these prophecies continue to be of value to the covenant people of God, for the church is still waiting for the realization of God's promises concerning the coming of Messiah, promises that will not be entirely fulfilled until he returns at the end of the ages. Though the types and shadows of the Old Testament have already vanished, the people of God must still be reminded to lift up their heads and see that their redemption draws near (Luke 21:28). They need to look away from a perishing world and be watching and waiting for the coming of a kingdom that will never be moved.

Each of these three marvelous prophecies heralds the coming of Christ in a different way. Haggai points to him in the central passage of his prophecy as the great *king* and temple builder, the desire of all nations (2:6–9). Zechariah, in chapter 6:9–15 of his prophecy, shows him to be a *priest* upon the throne, the one in whom the counsel of peace is realized and the glory of God's house guaranteed. Malachi foretells his coming as the messenger of the covenant, the great *prophet*, the one by whom the sons of Levi are purified and healed and made acceptable to the Lord (3:1–4).

The focus of these prophecies, then, is on the offices of Christ. He is forevermore the chief prophet, only high priest, and eternal king of his people. There are many other similarities between these books. Especially

in Haggai and Zechariah, who were contemporaries, there are many of the same themes, emphases, and even many similar expressions, but the unity of all three lies in what they teach about the offices of our Savior. They belong together and are like different movements of one great symphony that swells to its climax in the truth that Jesus Christ is everything to his church: that beside him the church has need of nothing. In him we are complete (Col. 2:10).

The three prophecies focus on Christ's offices by focusing on the men who held these offices in the closing days of the Old Testament: Zerubbabel, of the royal family of David, Joshua the high priest, and Malachi the prophet. Zerubbabel is the figure of Christ the king and temple builder, Joshua of Christ the enthroned priest, intercessor, and justifier of his people, and Malachi of Christ the messenger of the covenant.

These men appear in the three prophecies, but only to fade into the background as Christ reveals himself through them. Indeed, the offices these men held, the Old Testament offices of prophet, priest, and king, were fading and would soon pass away. Zerubbabel, though descended from King David, was only a local ruler under the Persian monarchs. Joshua, though high priest, was a priest without a temple, and Malachi the prophet was the last lonely prophetic voice of the Old Testament.

The fading of these offices was part of the fading and vanishing of all the Old Testament types and pictures, something that had to happen as the coming of Christ loomed. The types had to make way for the reality to which they pointed, which was nothing less than Christ and his everlasting and peaceable kingdom. That fading and vanishing of the types and shadows of the Old Testament had to take place for the sake of God's people as well. They had to look away from those temporary and perishing things to Christ himself, something they found very difficult to do. God helped them to do that by making those types much less attractive in these closing days of the Old Testament.

One of the most important of those types was the temple, and so the three prophecies are concerned also with the rebuilding of the temple (Haggai and Zechariah) and the worship of God in the temple (Malachi). The people had to be called to the work of rebuilding, had to be encouraged in that work, and, when it was built, had to be reminded that the temple was

INTRODUCTION

the house of God, a place to be kept holy. To be faithful in these duties they had to look away from that earthly temple to Christ who is the true temple builder and to the spiritual house that he would build.

So it is that the three prophecies not only testify to us of Christ, but call us to service in Christ's kingdom. The true temple of God, the church, is still being built, and though Christ is the great builder, we have the calling to build also. George Ophoff says:

Yet there is a sense, a very actual sense, in which the believers do and shall build the temple. The temple of the first covenant was a shadow...It symbolized the indwelling of the triune Jehovah in His church through Christ in His Spirit...It is plain in what sense God's believing people of this day do and shall built the temple. They may be said to build the temple when they bring to manifestation in this world the body of Christ through their chosen officebearers and place themselves under their jurisdiction in obedience to Christ. Thus they build the temple when they submit themselves to the ruling and teaching ministry that Christ has instituted in the church and receive their word and admonition. They build the temple when through these ministries as their organs they faithfully expound the Scripture and vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors. They build the temple when they lay off sin, put on Christ and walk in newness of life and fight the good fight. We saw how displeased God was with His people of old for their neglect of His temple. Not to be for Christ is to be against Him. Not to build the temple is to destroy it. Let then God's people build the temple which they do by His mercy. Let them not fear but let their hands be strong. For their labors are not vain in the Lord.¹

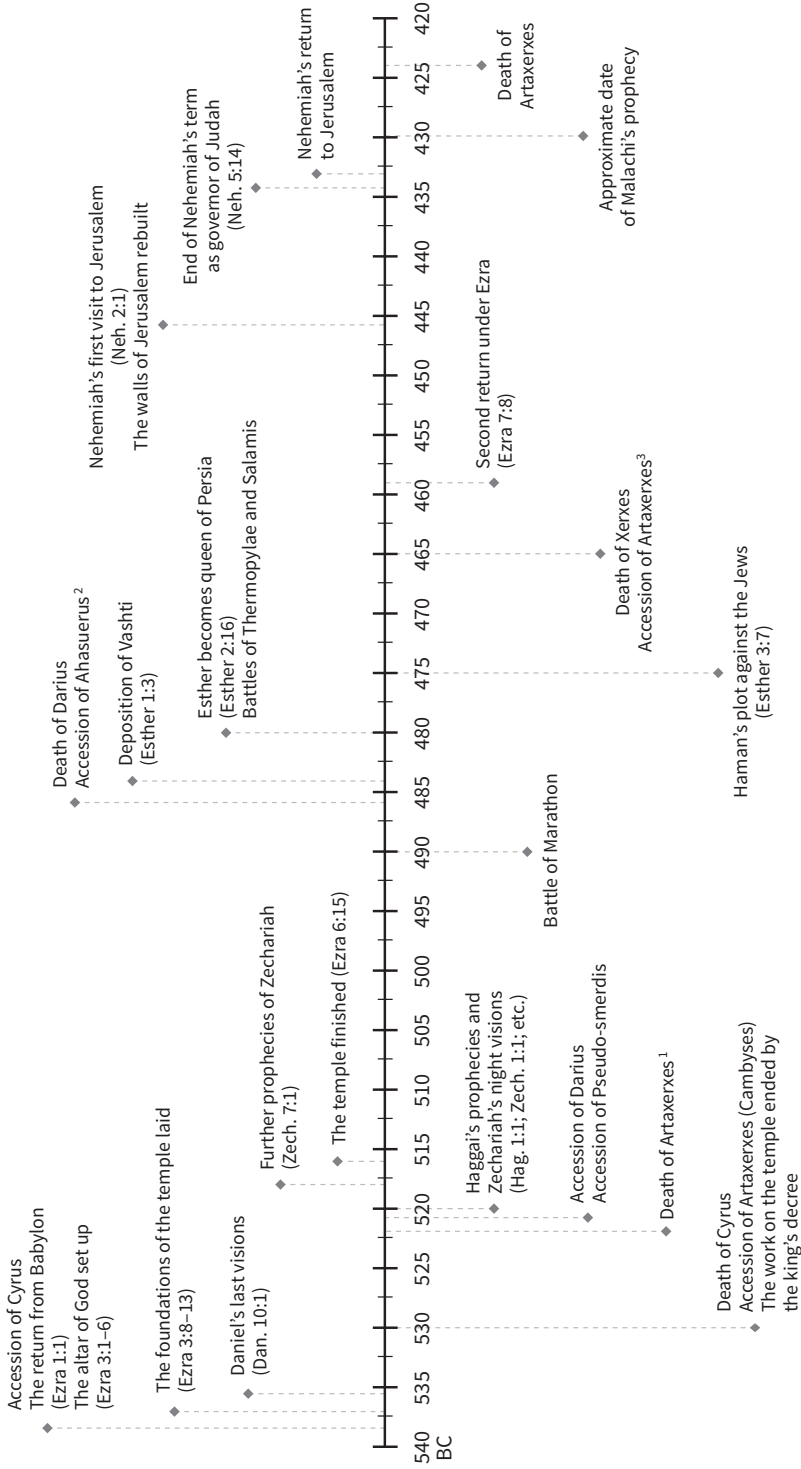
May our study of these prophecies bring the greater honor to Christ's blessed name as we too wait for him. May we, when the days are as dark as they were in the years after the restoration, look for this kingly Desire of all nations, this Priest upon the throne, this mighty Messenger of the covenant,

1 George M. Ophoff, "The Prophecy of Zechariah," *Standard Bearer* 33, no. 5 (Dec. 1, 1956): 106.

THE COMING OF ZION'S REDEEMER

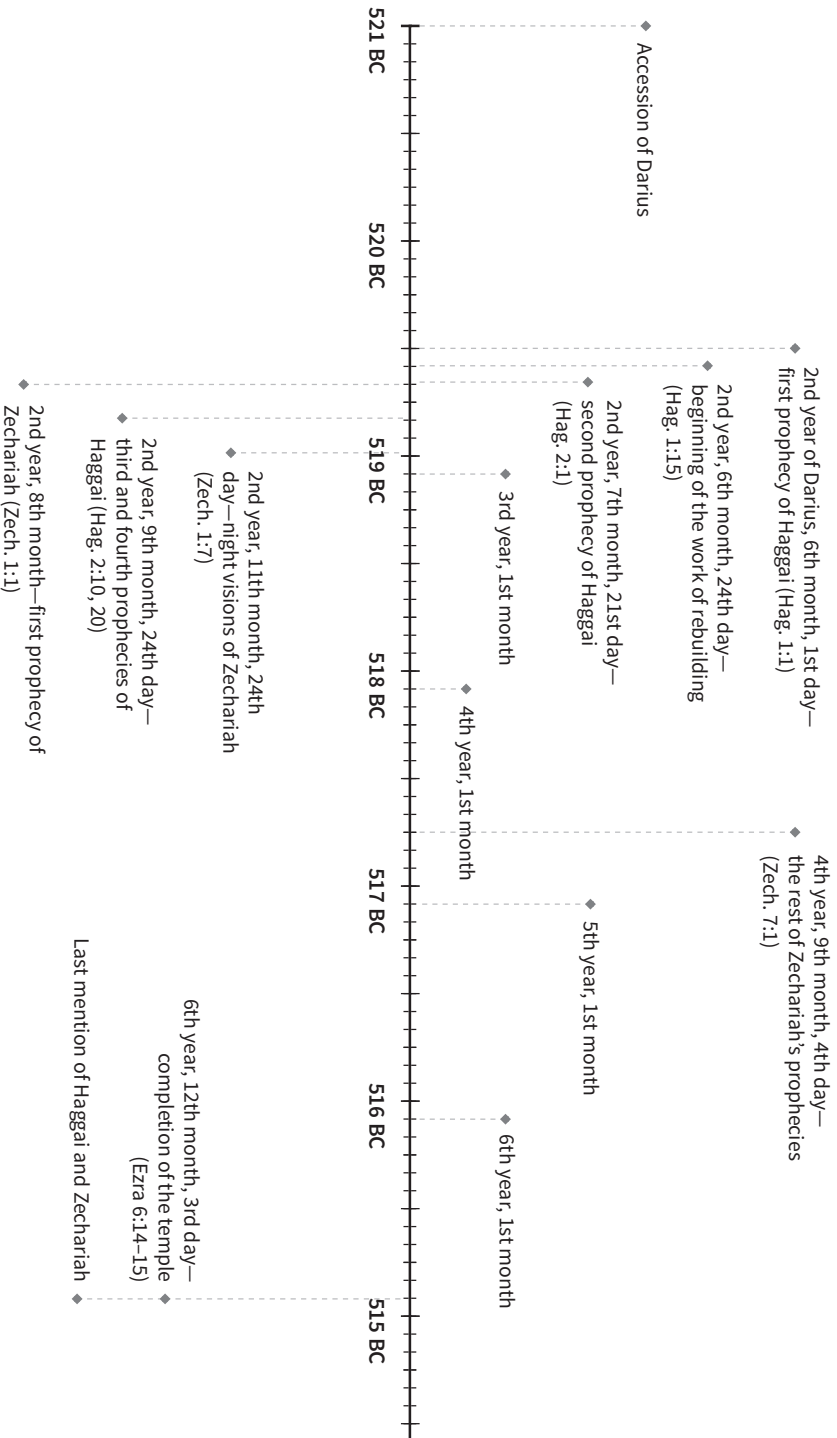
and see that he will bring salvation to Zion when he comes again. May we faithfully build in the house of our God, until that day when in the heavenly Jerusalem, there will be no need of a temple, when the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the only temple for God's people (Rev. 21:22).

The Years following the Return from Captivity in Babylon



1 Also known in history as Darius I, Darius Hystaspes, and Darius the Great.
 2 Called Ahasuerus in the book of Esther but known in x as Xerxes.
 3 Known in history as Artaxerxes I or Artaxerxes Longimanus.

The Prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah during the Reign of Darius (521 BC to 486 BC)





DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS

THE PROPHECY
OF HAGGAI

*For thus saith the LORD of hosts;
Yet once, it is a little while,
and I will shake the heavens, and the earth,
and the sea, and the dry land;
And I will shake all nations,
and the desire of all nations shall come:
and I will fill this house with glory,
saith the LORD of hosts.*

—Haggai 2:6–7

Introduction to Haggai

The prophecy of Haggai, though little known, is a book of enormous value not only as a record of God's dealings with his people in the Old Testament, but also as a prophecy of God's regard for and faithful care of his church in the New Testament. Haggai is a book about the church, about the calling that every member has in the church, and about God's faithfulness to his church. It is therefore a book that very much needs to be read and understood in times such as these, times in which the church is despised and neglected and fallen into spiritual ruin.

Haggai is about the church because it is about the temple, and the temple is one of the great Old Testament figures and types of the church, as Ephesians 2:19–22 says:

19. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;
20. And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;
21. In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:
22. In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

The prophecy concerns the rebuilding of the temple following Judah's return from captivity in Babylon. Though that might seem to have little bearing on our life and calling in the New Testament, it is a vivid and unforgettable reminder of the truth of the Reformation slogan that describes the church as "reformed and always reforming." When the church is reforming its doctrine and life according to the word of God and being built up in holiness, it is being built like the temple was in Haggai's days. The calling that Judah had to rebuild God's house is ours also therefore, and it is a calling that continues until the Desire of all nations comes again as he has promised.

The book of Haggai, however, is not just about the church, but about Christ. He is the true temple, the living temple of God in which God lives with his people in one house as their God and Father. He is the one in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead (Col. 2:9), as well as the one in whom we are complete (v. 10). “Destroy this temple,” he said to the Jews, “and in three days I will raise it up,” referring to the temple of his body (John 2:19–21). In that temple we dwell by faith, “for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones” (Eph. 5:30), and there, in Immanuel, God dwells with us. It is no surprise, then, that the central prophecy of Haggai concerns him as the desire of all nations, the true temple of God.

But he also appears in Haggai as the head and builder of the church (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22–23) through the figure of Zerubbabel as the great temple builder, without whom nothing can be accomplished. The prophecy of Haggai, then, is more about Christ than about the church. It speaks of the church only in relation to him, and that is the way it should be. Calvin summarizes Haggai’s message in this way: “Christ also would at length come to secure the perfect happiness and glory of the Church.”¹

The Author

Haggai is the first of the three prophets of the return. He began prophesying about two months before Zechariah, and the two of them prophesied about ninety years before Malachi. There can be no doubt that he is the author of these prophecies, since he is named nine times in the book and twice in Ezra. He worked as a prophet in Judah bringing God’s word about the rebuilding of the temple, as confirmed in Ezra 5:1–2:

1. Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them.
2. Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua [also called Joshua] the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of

1 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950), 4:316.

INTRODUCTION TO HAGGAI

God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them.

He is also mentioned in Ezra 6:14:

And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

Some suggest that although Haggai is the author of the prophecies, this does not necessarily mean that he actually *wrote* the book, since he is referred to in the third person throughout. Three times, however, we read literally that the word of the Lord came “in the hand of Haggai” (1:1, 3; 2:1; see also Gal. 3:19; Col. 4:18; and 2 Thess. 3:17), which would indicate that he is both the one through whom these prophecies came and the one who wrote them down.

That the prophecies of the book are the word of the Lord by the hand of Haggai reminds us of what we believe concerning the inspiration of the scriptures. In this book too, God used a man to preserve his word in writing for all ages, while insuring that what was written remained “the word of the Lord,” infallible and perfect.

We know nothing about Haggai, except that he prophesied about twenty years after the return from Babylon as a contemporary of the prophet Zechariah, when Zerubbabel was governor of Judah and Darius was king of the Persians. Haggai is not mentioned elsewhere in scripture, except in Ezra, and neither his prophecy nor the book of Ezra gives us any information about him.

As far as we know, he delivered only four prophecies, each of which is marked in the book of Haggai by a date. Those four prophecies were given over a period of just under four months (fifteen weeks). There is the possibility that Haggai’s career as a prophet was longer than this short span of fifteen weeks. Ezra 6:14 may mean that Haggai continued to prophesy until the temple was finished, but whether Haggai’s career as a prophet lasted longer, and whether

there were other prophecies besides these four, we really do not know. If there were other prophecies, the wisdom of God has not given them to us.

That we know so little of Haggai is of some significance. What he says is the word of God, and the man himself matters very little in light of that important fact. As the word of God and not the words of a man, his message must be heard by God's people in every age. It is a divine message, the relevance of which has not changed though many hundreds of years have passed and though the circumstances of the church are ever so different.

That Haggai apparently prophesied for only a very short time speaks also of the Lord's sovereignty in his dealings with his people. The men he uses to bring his word are merely instruments of his sovereignty and grace, to be used as he sees fit, even if it is only for a few months and to speak a few words.

The Date

The book dates itself to the second year of Darius, king of Persia. This is confirmed in Ezra 4:24: "Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia."

This Darius is not the same man as Darius the Mede, the conqueror of Babylon, mentioned in Daniel 5:28. He had died about twenty years earlier and had been followed by Cyrus the Great, who sent the Jews back to Judah, and by several other kings. The Darius of Haggai's days is almost certainly Darius I Hystaspes, also known as Darius the Great, who ruled Persia from 521 to 486 BC. Haggai, then, prophesied around 520 BC, approximately twenty years after the return from captivity and during the early years of Darius's rule.

In secular history Darius is the Persian king who first tried to conquer Greece and whose armies were defeated at the battle of Marathon. It is striking that, great king though he was, none of his exploits are mentioned in scripture. Scripture's bare mention of him tells us that God judges greatness by a different standard than men do. Those who are great in the world are usually of little account in the kingdom of God, and those who are unnoticed and who die unremembered in the world, like Haggai, are often of great account before God.

In the book of Haggai Darius is important only insofar as the rebuilding of the temple is dated to his reign. The important event on God's calendar in those days, that which in his eyes was worthy of note and a great event of history, was the rebuilding of the temple, not the accession and power of this famous world ruler.

The History

The book of Haggai highlights the rebuilding of God's house as the main reason for the return from captivity. God was concerned more than anything else with his house and the glory of his own name in that house. Even the return of his people from captivity and their reestablishment in the promised land was only a means to that end. In New Testament terms, this is God's way of saying that the church is more important than the salvation of the individual members or their well-being, though in God's purpose the two are connected.

What a testimony Haggai is against the spirit that pervades Christianity today, the selfish idea that makes our own salvation and blessedness the most important thing of all and that relegates the church and the members of the church to a lesser place in the lives of believers. This is the spirit that permits believers to abandon the church altogether, or to float around from church to church looking for something that moves them or warms their hearts. It is the spirit that encourages passivity in the members of the church even when the church is declining. They shrug their shoulders, refuse to work at church reformation, and suggest that because they themselves are saved it matters not that the church goes to ruin.

That the rebuilding of the temple took place many years after the return is the reason Haggai had to bring the word of God to God's people in Judah. It was twenty or more years after the return, and the temple was not yet completed. The work had been started almost as soon as the Jews had first returned to Judah. Seven months after the decree of Cyrus they were back in Canaan, and the next year they were already busy with the rebuilding of the temple and had laid its foundation (Ezra 3:8-13).

In the years that followed, however, very little more was done, so that at the time of Haggai's prophecies the temple was still unfinished. Originally the work had stopped because of the interference of Judah's enemies. Those

enemies, especially the Samaritans, had hired counselors (something on the order of lawyers) who did all they could to stop the work (Ezra 4:4–5). Their efforts had been unsuccessful while Cyrus and his successor, Ahasuerus (not the husband of Esther but a man known to secular history as Cambyses, Ezra 4:1–6), were still living. When a man named Artaxerxes (known in history as Pseudo-smerdis) became king, they were able to have the work stopped (Ezra 4:6–24).² Artaxerxes listened to the charges of these enemies, concluded that the rebuilding of the temple would be an occasion for rebellion, and ordered the work halted.

Nevertheless, as God pointed out through Haggai, the interference of these enemies was not the only reason the temple remained unbuilt. The work God had given Judah to do had been neglected. God admonishes that neglect through Haggai's prophecies, urging the Jews to finish their work on the temple and promising them his blessings when they obeyed.

The Jews did obey, and the work on the temple was finished five years later, in the last month of the sixth year of the reign of Darius (Ezra 6:15). Apparently Haggai was still living or prophesying when the work was finished since he is mentioned in Ezra 6:14, but his concern was getting the work underway and encouraging the people to continue. Once that was accomplished, he faded from the scene of biblical history. God's word through him, however, remains and continues to be of value to the church.

The Divisions

These prophecies of Haggai are four, each identified by the date on which it was brought, all of them in the second year of Darius. The first is dated to the first day of the sixth month and is found in Haggai 1:1–15. The second came less than two months later, on the twenty-first day of the seventh month, and is found in Haggai 2:1–9. The third and fourth were another two months later, on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, and include Haggai 2:10–19 and 2:20–23.

Most scholars agree that the dates in Haggai can be determined with quite a degree of accuracy from Babylonian records.

² See the timeline of the years following the return from Babylon on page xv for a list of these kings and the years they ruled.

INTRODUCTION TO HAGGAI

REFERENCE	DARIUS'S YEAR	MONTH	DAY	CALENDAR DATE
1:1	2	6	1	29 August 520 BC
1:15	2	6	24	21 September 520 BC
	(this is not a new prophecy, but the date the work began anew)			
2:1	2	7	21	17 October 520 BC
2:10	2	9	24	18 December 520 BC ³

That the dates can be worked out so accurately is further testimony to the importance of the temple in this period of Israel's history.

Haggai and Zechariah

There are many similarities between Haggai and Zechariah. Both mention Zerubbabel and Joshua by name. Both are concerned with the rebuilding of the temple. Both mention the *mountain* of the Lord's house. Both are concerned with God's covenant, and in both the Spirit is promised, a rather rare promise in the Old Testament. Both describe the overthrow of the heathen nations, Judah's oppressors. Both are concerned with current events and reach to the end of time and the return of Christ as redeemer and judge. Where Haggai speaks briefly, Zechariah speaks at more length. What Haggai only mentions is more fully revealed in Zechariah. Nevertheless, they bring the same message of comfort and hope. They, with Isaiah, had the commission, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. 40:1-2).

The two prophets are similar because they were contemporaries, they both prophesied about the rebuilding of the temple, and their message is really the same. Concerned with the rebuilding of the temple, they are also both concerned with the realization of God's covenant in Christ, for the temple was the place of God's covenant in the Old Testament and a picture of the church as God's dwelling place in the New. The two together promise God's continual presence among his people and his unchangeable faithfulness to them in that temple/church. Thus it is that they speak so plainly to

³ See J. Alec Motyer, "Haggai," in Thomas Edward McComiskey, ed., *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 3:967.

the church of the New Testament as well as to the church of the Old, and though couched in Old Testament language are like the books of the New Testament.

The Four Prophecies

We have seen that the book of Haggai contains four prophecies, each introduced by the date on which it was delivered. The first prophecy is a call to be busy with the work of building the temple, accompanied by a warning against further neglect of the work. In that warning God points out the sins of his people and shows them how he was punishing them for those sins. Though they did not recognize the fact, many of the troubles they were suffering in Judah were God's chastisement.

Attached to that first prophecy is a historical notice of the people's obedience to God's word and a further word of encouragement to them in their work of rebuilding. Haggai does not tell that part of the story, but after restarting the work, the Jews, to the consternation of their enemies, obtained a decree from the king allowing them to build and providing them with the necessities for building and for the worship of God in the temple (Ezra 5:3–6:13).

The second prophecy, found in chapter 2:1–9, is the most important of them all. In it God addresses the discouragement of the people, who could see, now that the work was progressing, that the temple they were building did not compare to Solomon's temple. God not only encourages them with the promise that he would live in the temple as in old times, but also points them forward to the coming of Christ, to the building of the true temple, and to its glory, which would be far greater than the glory of Solomon's temple. This second prophecy, therefore, concerns the future history of the temple and carries us all the way to the end of the world, to the day when all things will be shaken and destroyed and only the true temple will remain.

The third prophecy is a reminder to the people, through an example taken from the law of Moses, that because the work was God's work, they must be holy and work with holy hands. The warning is reinforced in chapter 2:13–19, with a reminder of God's former judgments and a promise of future blessing.

The fourth of these prophecies speaks again of the coming of Christ as

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the one who would build the true temple. Christ is spoken of in the figure of Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and under that figure God guarantees the building of his house and at the same time promises his people complete deliverance from their enemies. All this, in the fourth prophecy, is grounded in God's great and eternal love for his people, the motive for all his dealings with them.

Thus these prophecies take us into the New Testament and have to do not only with Old Testament events but with the first coming of Christ, as well as with those things that are now taking place between Christ's coming as the desire of all nations and his return to shake all things. The book of Haggai is only quoted once in the New Testament, in Hebrews 12:26, but it is very much a book for New Testament believers, a book that may not be neglected and forgotten, a book that concerns the church of Jesus Christ in the world and the calling of believers in relation to the church.

Chapter 1

THE FIRST PROPHECY: HAGGAI 1:1-15

- 1:1 In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying,
- 1:2 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built.
- 1:3 Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying,
- 1:4 Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?
- 1:5 Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.
- 1:6 Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.
- 1:7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.
- 1:8 Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.
- 1:9 Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.
- 1:10 Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.
- 1:11 And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.

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- 1:12 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, 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 did fear before the LORD.
- 1:13 Then spake Haggai the LORD's messenger in the LORD's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD.
- 1:14 And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God,
- 1:15 In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

1:1. In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying,

The first of the month was a Jewish feast or holiday (Num. 28:11–15). It is possible, therefore, that this first prophecy was given in the temple area. This would have meant that Haggai had a large audience and could point to the unfinished temple itself as evidence of the people's failure to honor and obey God.

The mention of Darius is a reminder that the Jews, at the time of Haggai's prophecy, were no longer an independent nation but under the dominion of foreign and heathen kings. They even dated events now by the reigns of these strange kings who ruled from far-off Persia. The fact that this king is not the same king who sent them back to Judah shows that many years had passed and the work of the temple was not yet finished. It was Cyrus who had sent them back, and now another king named Darius was on the throne of Persia and the temple was still in ruins. It was also a reminder that circumstances had changed once again and they could no longer use the hostility of former kings as an excuse for their neglect of God's house.

There is some controversy about whether the sixth month was the sixth month of the reign of Darius or the sixth month of the Jewish year, but the question is of little significance. The main reasons for carefully dating each of the prophecies are threefold: first, to show how long the people had been remiss in their calling; second, to show their quick obedience to God's command when rebuked for their sloth and indifference; and third, to show God's faithfulness in encouraging them and helping them in the work. He always immediately encouraged their willingness to work and was quick to see their troubles and discouragements and to assist them. The date is otherwise unimportant.

Most important, the word Haggai brings, whether a word of rebuke or of encouragement, is God's word, literally "the word of *Jehovah*," Israel's covenant God, the one whose covenantal faithfulness never fails. The phrase "saith the LORD" is found over and over again in Haggai, as often as three times in the same verse (2:4, 23). Judah had to know that their calling to

rebuild the temple did not depend on the whims of earthly kings, however great they might be, but came from the King of kings himself. Nothing and no one might stand in the way of their obedience. God, not Cyrus or Darius, had commanded the building of his house and commanded it as the God of the covenant.

The idea that the word Haggai brings is really God's word is prominent here. Literally we read that the word came "in the hand of" Haggai, a rather unusual expression in the Old Testament, but it emphasizes the truth that Haggai was only a channel for this message from God—only the carrier of it.

That emphasis on the word of God is very important today. The calling to rebuild God's house is for us the calling to labor faithfully in and for the church. We will do so, as Judah did, only when we are certain our calling comes to us from God himself and concerns his house. If we do not understand that the calling is from God, we will be as neglectful and indifferent as Israel was before the word of God came to them through Haggai. If we think the church is only a human institution and that we work in the church only on our own behalf, then indifference will follow.

A quick glance at the book of Haggai will show that God most often identifies himself in the book by the name Jehovah and that Jehovah is used many times in this very short book, thirty-four times in thirty-eight verses. The name very often appears as "the LORD of hosts," or more literally, "Jehovah of hosts." In comparison, the only other name used is the name "God," and that only three times.

God uses his name Jehovah to teach Judah and us that the temple, called here his house, is a part of his covenant with his people. There he chooses to live with his people, to reveal himself as their God, and to take them as his own. That living together is what his covenant is all about, and so he uses his covenant name time and time again.

This first word of God is addressed especially to Zerubbabel the governor (also called Sheshbazzar in Ezra 1:11; 5:14, 16) and Joshua the high priest (also referred to as Jeshua). That does not mean that God is not speaking to the rest of the people. He addresses all of them through their leaders. Zerubbabel was a descendant of King David and the grandson of Jehoiachin, the second-to-last king of Judah. He would have been king himself if Judah had been an independent nation and if the throne of David had not fallen from

its former glory. He is mentioned in 1 Chronicles (3:19), Ezra, Nehemiah, Matthew (1:12), and Luke (3:27). In Matthew and Luke he is identified as one of the ancestors of Jesus. Joshua was a descendant of Aaron and is mentioned also in the prophecy of Zechariah (3:1–9; 6:11).

The mention of these two men is evidence of God's faithfulness to Judah, a faithfulness that makes their unfaithfulness all the more inexcusable. God had preserved the lines of both David and Aaron through the awful years that led to and followed the Babylonian captivity. He had preserved those lines not because there was any merit in the house of David or of Aaron, but that his promises, especially the promise to live with his people and to be their God, might not fail.

More importantly, these men in their offices of priest and governor represent Christ himself. It is really through him and from him that this word of God concerning the temple comes, and it is by his grace that the word of God through Haggai bears the good fruit of obedience in the hearts and lives of God's people. Even in the Old Testament he was the great temple builder, and nothing could or would be done without him.

Christ, then, is the governor or king by whom the true temple of God is built. It is as king that he describes the building of the true temple in John: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19). He is also the great high priest in the house of God (Heb. 3:1–3; 8:1–2), through whom and in whom God is worshiped in his temple and the worshipers themselves are sanctified. Through Zerubbabel and Joshua as figures of Christ, this word of God comes to God's people to insure their obedience.

1:2. Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built.

To understand the book of Haggai and its relevance to the New Testament church, we must see that the Old Testament temple, called here the "LORD's house," prefigures the institute or visible church. The institute church is the church on earth manifested in different congregations and denominations. It is the church organized according to the rules of God's word with its pastors, elders, deacons, and members—the church busy with the work of preaching the gospel, administering the sacraments and church discipline, worshiping God, and living together in fellowship.

That this church is the spiritual reality of which that temple was a figure or type is clear from the witness of the New Testament. In 1 Timothy 3:15, the institute church, the church in the world, is given the *same name* as it is here in Haggai: “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the *house of God*, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (emphasis added).

We know that Paul is speaking of the institute church in 1 Timothy 3:15 because he recommends proper behavior in the church, in this case the church or congregation of Ephesus, where Timothy was minister. That church, not the building but the members and officers organized according to the rules of God’s word, is the house of God. Of that church Haggai is speaking when he speaks prophetically of the house of God.

Why do the Old Testament temple and the New Testament church have the same name in scripture? They are both called the house of God because they are the place of God’s covenant, the house where God and his people live together under one roof and as one family—where he is their Father and Jesus is their elder brother through the communion of the Holy Spirit. This identity of temple and church is our point of contact with the prophecy of Haggai.

God had promised that the temple would be his house, the place of his covenant, in the Old Testament:

44. And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest’s office.

45. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. (Ex. 29:44–45)

That promise was first fulfilled when God in the cloud of glory came to the tabernacle in the wilderness.

For the same reason the church is called the house of God in the New Testament. It is the place above all others where God lives with his people in blessed and close covenantal fellowship. It is the place where the family of God meets together, eats together the bread of life, and does the work of God’s kingdom and covenant.

If the temple is not the church prefigured and typified, the book of Haggai has nothing to say to us as New Testament Christians. Even if it is true, as

the dispensationalists believe, that the Old Testament temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem during a thousand-year period preceding the end of the world, that temple and the book of Haggai are still of no significance for us. The temple and sacrifices were Jewish and will remain so even if the temple is rebuilt. In that case our interest in Haggai can only be that of idle curiosity.

If the temple is the same as the church in the New Testament, the calling to rebuild the temple is our calling—the calling to be always busy building and rebuilding the church. Of that calling we will speak more fully as we go on, but that calling is carried out in the New Testament in all the work of the church, as well as in the way of church reformation. It is the constant calling of every believer, something the great Protestant Reformation recognized in its description of the true church as “reformed and always reforming.” It is the work all God’s people do when they are working for the cause and kingdom of God.

Here, in Haggai 1:2, God points out that the reason for the unfinished work on the temple was not the interference of enemies or even the decree of the king, but that the people had given up in the face of many difficulties. They had not entirely forgotten God’s command, but they were suggesting that the work should be left to some future and more propitious time. As Calvin suggests, their reasoning was along these lines:

It is indeed true that the worship of God is deservedly to be preferred to all other things; but the Lord grants us this indulgence, so that we are allowed to build our own houses; and in the meantime we attend to the sacrifices. Have not our fathers lived many ages without a Temple? God was then satisfied with a sanctuary [the tabernacle]: there is now an altar erected, and there sacrifices are offered. The Lord then will forgive us if we defer the building of the Temple to a suitable time. But in the meantime every one may build his own house, so that afterwards the Temple may at leisure be built more sumptuously.¹

When in Babylon the Jews had sung:

1 Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, 4:324.

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By Babel's riverside we sat in tears,
Rememb'ring Zion's pride in former years,
While on the weeping willows there were hung
The harps our grief had silenced and unstrung.

For they who led us there a captive throng
Required that we prepare for them a song;
Yea, there our captors asked for mirth and praise,
Required a song of Zion's happy days.

O how shall we thus sing at their command
Songs of the Lord, our King, in this strange land?
O Zion, if I e'er forget thy woe,
Let my right hand its skill no longer know.
Yea, let my tongue, I pray, all silent be,
If I do not always remember thee;
If I prefer not thee, though in thy grief,
Above all other joys my very chief.²

But how quickly they had forgotten Zion when once they were back in their own land and busy once again with their plowing, planting, and decorating!

The decree of Artaxerxes and the efforts of the Samaritans to halt the work had been taken by the Jews as a sign that God did not really mean them to be rebuilding the temple at that particular time. They had done what so many do today: taken what they thought was a sign from God and used that as an excuse to neglect God's explicit command. Christians today are also quick to find signs in circumstances that allow them, they think, to live in disobedience to God's explicit commands in the scriptures. If their disobedience is pointed out, they excuse themselves by saying, "But God showed me that this is what I must do." Further inquiry will usually reveal that God's showing them what to do is nothing more than their taking some event in their lives as a sign from God.

² No. 380:1–4, in *The Psalter with Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and Added Chorale Section*, reprinted and revised edition of the 1912 United Presbyterian *Psalter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1927; rev. ed. 1995).

We must remember that God's word is our only guide and rule for faith and life. Nothing from God will ever contradict his word or allow us to live in disobedience to his word. That is not to say that God does not guide us through circumstances, but we must be very careful that we do not misinterpret circumstances and providences, something we most certainly are doing if our understanding of those circumstances leads us into disobedience to God's revealed will in the scriptures.

A young person who is considering marriage might think on the basis of circumstances that God is showing him whom to marry by the fact that God has brought another person into his life to whom he is attracted and who has come to depend on him and be his friend. But if that other person is an unbeliever, the command of God in 1 Corinthians 7:39 stands: "only in the Lord," and no circumstance may be interpreted in such a way that it allows anyone to disobey that rule.

The clearest and perhaps the only way that God guides us through circumstances is when he makes something impossible or does not give us what we have asked of him. Even that, however, is open to misinterpretation, as the example of these Jews showed. Especially the decree of Artaxerxes suggested that it was impossible to build the temple at that time. Nevertheless, they had the command of God, and at no time may difficulties, however great, come into conflict with such a command.

That God calls himself here the Lord of hosts is a reminder that he controlled King Artaxerxes and all their enemies and that the difficulties they faced in the work were really from him. The name Lord of hosts, used twelve times in this book, refers to the fact that all creatures in heaven and on earth—men, angels and devils, righteous and wicked, even inanimate things—are God's army or host, which he commands and through which he brings to pass his own sovereign and unchangeable will.

Here God is reminding the people of Israel that the difficulties they faced were not outside of his control and most certainly should not have allowed them to think they could disobey his command to rebuild the temple. When he refers to them through Haggai as "this people," and not "my people," he evidences his displeasure with their disobedience.

What the Jews were saying to excuse their disobedience, then, was nothing more than pious-sounding hypocrisy that was not much different

from what many do and say today. No one will argue that the church today very much needs rebuilding. Its worship is often profane and conducted with no thought for the glory of God, its members are wayward if not completely worldly, its witness is weak and faltering, and its work is misdirected. Yet instead of working to correct these things and to rebuild the church on a more biblical foundation, many point to the times in which we live, which are evil, and use them as an excuse for forsaking the church and its work altogether, or for sitting back and waiting for someone else to fight the battles and do the work that needs to be done.

Many people do not even realize that every Christian is called to that work, as all the Jews were in this verse. Not only the leaders but also the *people* were rebuked for sloth and indifference by Haggai. In that respect too, things are not very different today. The people may not lay all the blame on the ministers, elders, and deacons of the church for the sad condition of the church, when they themselves are not willing to take up the work that needs doing.

1:3. Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying,

1:4. Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?

The Jews had pleaded the difficulties they faced as an excuse for their failure to carry out God's command to rebuild the temple. They pled their poverty, the hostility of the Samaritans, and the decree of Artaxerxes as proof that the time had not come to build God's house. God rebuked them for that, but he also points out in Haggai 1:3–4 the real reason for their failure: a gross materialism that revealed itself in a greater concern for their own houses than for God's house. Worse, their lack of concern for God's house was really a lack of regard for God himself and for the covenant he had established with them.

When they had first arrived back in Judah, they had immediately begun the work of rebuilding the temple and had shown a greater concern for it than for their own homes and farms, though those homesteads were ruined and overrun with weeds and wild beasts. That had changed so that they were now living in homes of their own, but God's house was still waste. God says to them, "You have a place to live and I don't."

We must not misunderstand. That God lived in the temple in the Old Testament does not mean that he was confined to it. Solomon had confessed at the dedication of the temple, "Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" (1 Kings 8:27). God's living in the temple meant that he revealed his glory there as the God of his people, spoke to them there, and kept his covenant with them there. So until the temple was finished there was no place for God to reveal himself to Judah. Judah's lack of concern for the temple reflected, therefore, their attitude toward God and his covenant.

Verse 4 makes it clear that the temple was far from finished at this time. God speaks of it as lying waste. That alone shows that there was much more to all of this than just the difficulties they were using as an excuse. The decree of Artaxerxes forbidding the work had only been passed about five years earlier, but twenty years had passed since the return and little had been done beyond the laying of the foundation. They just did not care about God's house and had spent their time working on their own homes.

Not only was the temple unfinished but, as the words "lie waste" suggest, the site had been largely abandoned, the worship of God at the temple site had ceased, and the work that had been done previously had fallen again into decay and ruin. All that belonged to the temple was no longer of any concern to Judah.

When God speaks of their ceiled houses, the idea is not just that their houses were finished and could now be lived in, but that they had even had time to decorate and furnish their houses. The word used is the same as that used to describe Solomon's work on the inside of the temple and of his own palace (1 Kings 6:9; 7:3, 7). God describes their houses as "ceiled" to show how little concern they had for his house. It was not just that they needed roofs over their heads and places to live, but that their only interest was in their own comfort.

God puts them in their place by the double "you" of verse 4. He is reminding them that he is their savior and they are his people whom he brought out of Babylon and took safely back to the land of Canaan. The words therefore express a certain incredulousness that they, who owe so much to God, should have so little care for his house and have such selfish regard for their own: "You, you of all people, let my house lie waste?" May we never be like them.

That the Israelites to whom Haggai preached showed more concern for their own homes than for the house of God is a recurring problem in the church. All too often God's people seem to be concerned only for their own homes and families in their finances, in the use of their time, in their goals, and in their efforts. They have time for everything but the work of the church, so much so that sometimes it is difficult to find men to serve in the offices of the church and to take the lead in building up the church. Families can afford everything but the church budget. Recreations and holidays take priority over worship. Work and other responsibilities keep members from the Bible studies and other meetings of the church. Membership is considered of very little importance, and even where Christians are members of a church, their membership involves very little commitment to God, to his word, or to the work of the church. We, like the Jews, live in ceiled houses while God's house lies waste.

T. V. Moore says it well.

Men are always prone to put religion off with scraps and leavings, and serve God with what costs them nothing. In the outward things of religion they are much more disposed to work for themselves than for God; and if they have time that cannot be otherwise used, or funds that are not very current, to give them to the treasury of the Lord, and if any larger expenditure of either is urged, to plead that "the time has not come" to do this work. In the inward things of religion the same spirit is shown. The young, the middle aged and the old, all alike procrastinate the great work, on the plea that "the time has not come," the convenient season that, like the horizon, recedes as we advance.³

The result is that the church institute is broken down and ruined as the temple was in Haggai's times. Preaching, sacraments, and discipline have fallen on hard times. Worship is seldom carried on in obedience to God's word. The members, instead of being built up, have their faith undermined and weakened. The church is hardly recognizable as the church instituted by

3 Thomas V. Moore, *A Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1979), 65–66.

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Christ and, if not entirely ruined, resembles more an entertainment facility of some sort, a club, or a social services agency.

The lament of Psalm 74 is as true today as in the Old Testament.

Remember Thy inheritance,
Thy Church, redeemed by grace;
Remember Zion's mount profaned,
Thy ancient dwelling place.
In ruin long Thy temple lies;

Arise, O God of grace,
And see the ruin foes have wrought
Within Thy holy place.

Amid thy courts are lifted high
The standards of the foe,
And impious hands with axe and fire
Have laid Thy temple low.

They have profaned the holy place
Where Thou hast set Thy Name,
The sanctuaries of our God
Are given to the flame.

We see no signs of power divine,
No prophet speaks for Thee,
And none can tell, and none can know,
How long these woes shall be.⁴

All this does not mean we should have no concern for our own houses, whether the building or the lives that are lived there, but God insists that his house is more important than ours and that we can be blessed in ours only when our first concern is for his. That may appear to be very selfish of God and show a lack of love for us, but it really is not so. God's own glory and honor are the most important things and ought to be most important to

4 No. 205:2–6, in *The Psalter*.

us, not the least because we cannot be blessed apart from him. Knowing his own glory and our need for him, he insists that his house must be built and that we love it more than our own houses.

1:5. Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.

1:6. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.

Having pointed out and rebuked the sins of Judah, God now calls them to self-examination and repentance. He wishes them to see that their ways are sinful and displeasing to him by acknowledging their sin and turning from it. Though God does not explicitly call for repentance, that is what he has in mind. There is no value in considering our ways if this does not lead us to turn to ways that are pleasing to God. It is much the same with God as with an earthly father who says to his child, "Look what you've done." He means, "Do you not see that you have done wrong? You must acknowledge it and turn from your wrongdoing."

We should note too that dealing with our sins always involves a consideration of our ways and a turning from the old ways of sin. The person who considers his ways but goes on in them has not truly repented of his sins. This becomes abundantly clear in verses 7–8, where God does call Judah to new ways of obedience.

This call for repentance and conversion is addressed not only to Judah but also to us. If we have neglected the house of God, the church, or have shown a lack of care for the church as the place of God's covenant, we too must consider our ways and turn from whatever evil we have done. We must consider our ways and see that Judah's sins are ours and that God is speaking to us as well as to them. If we do not, we are as blind and ignorant as they were before this word of God came to them.

God enforces that call to self-examination and repentance by telling Judah that he had been punishing them for their sins, though they were unaware of it. Among the troubles they had suffered were famine, crop failure, bad weather, drought, and disease (see also 1:10–11; 2:17). These

troubles had come from God as chastisement for their sin. Not all their problems, therefore, could be blamed on their enemies or on the decree of Artaxerxes. God makes sure that they see these things as his judgment and not as an excuse for forsaking the work of rebuilding.

God says that their crops had been small, so no one had enough to eat and drink or even sufficient clothing. These are the judgments that had been threatened in Deuteronomy as punishment for disobedience: poor crops in Deuteronomy 28:38, lack of food in Deuteronomy 8:10, and insufficient clothing in Deuteronomy 10:18; and God was fulfilling his own word in sending them. Under these judgments it had been as though everything they earned was put in a bag full of holes. And so it is always. Those who will not obey God cannot be and are not blessed and do not prosper.

All this raises the question concerning the relationship between obedience and material prosperity. Especially in the New Testament, is it true that those who live in obedience to God can expect material prosperity or receive it when it comes as a sign of God's favor and blessing? That is a question that needs answering.

Material prosperity, according to scripture, can be an evidence of God's blessing. That would be impossible to deny. In the Old Testament this was far truer than in the New Testament. God made it clear to Israel that prosperity in the land of Canaan was evidence of his good pleasure and that drought and enemies were signs of his displeasure. Even in the Old Testament, however, this was not true absolutely. The book of Job is a lengthy lesson otherwise and shows that prosperity does not equal blessing on a personal level. In the Old Testament therefore, prosperity was a sign of God's blessing *nationally*, but not *individually*. Times of national prosperity did not mean that everyone in the nation was blessed by God, and times of trouble did not mean that every individual was under God's curse.

What is more, there were times when God sent enemies and other troubles for reasons of his own and not because the nation as a whole was living wickedly. Had Hezekiah and Judah been unfaithful when God sent Rabshakeh and the Assyrians against them? There is no evidence that they had. The people of God, therefore, needed the prophets and the word of God to interpret their circumstances and to tell them that God was pleased or displeased with them.

What was true individually in the Old Testament continues to be true in the New. Individual prosperity or the lack of it cannot be interpreted as a sign of God's favorable or unfavorable attitude. God can, as Psalm 73 so clearly teaches, send prosperity as a curse or send evil things for our good, so that all things work together for good to those who love God (Rom. 8:28). There is no common grace or favor or mercy of God in things, and those who think so have no explanation for God's giving prosperity and earthly gifts to the ungodly whom he will send to hell, or for his sending cancer and other ills to those he loves.

However, we often *feel* that God is displeased with us when we are not living in obedience to God and when he, in those circumstances, sends trouble and grief into our lives. It is also possible that, walking in sinful ways, we have all we want and prosper in our wickedness. That is not proof of God's blessing but of God's setting us in slippery places (Ps. 73:18) or filling our mouths while he sends leanness in our souls (Ps. 106:15).

The only nation of God that now exists is a spiritual nation, the church. No earthly nation, not the USA, not Scotland, not the Netherlands, can claim to stand in the favored position that Israel had in the Old Testament, and even Israel in its favored position was a type and foreshadowing of the church. That the church is that favored nation is taught in 1 Peter 2:9: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

The prosperity that God gives his church when she is faithful and obedient is not crops and good weather and freedom from hunger and disease, but spiritual prosperity. The church that is being blessed by God is not necessarily the wealthiest church, but the church in which the members are enjoying all the riches of God's grace and salvation. When the church is not prospering spiritually, when the people of God go spiritually hungry and thirsty, and when they are like the church of Laodicea, spiritually poor and blind and naked, they may certainly conclude that there is something desperately wrong and they must consider their ways.

Let us then, as members of the church, be always busy considering our ways. Let us observe the spiritual condition of the church and not be blind to the fact that God may very well be sending his judgments on the church for

her unfaithfulness. Certainly we must not think that because the members of the church are prosperous in material things and because the church has many members and enough in the offerings to pay for all sorts of programs, these things are evidence of God's blessing. The church is blessed when the members of the church are clothed in the spotless robes of Christ's righteousness and when they have the bread of life as the food of their souls and the water of life as their refreshment.

1:7. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.

1:8. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.

As in verse 5, the Lord again admonishes his people and calls them to self-examination and repentance with the words, "Consider your ways." We are so sluggish that the word of God must come repeatedly before we are roused from our sloth and begin to do what God requires. In this we are no different from Judah. That God does continue to send his word and its admonitions is itself an evidence of his faithfulness and mercy. Instead of saying, "Enough is enough," he continues to call.

In this second call we see another side of repentance and conversion: that it is not only a turning from sin, but also a returning to God's ways and to God himself. God shows this by calling the people back to the work of building his house and by promising that he will bless them if they do what he requires.

We may never think, though, that God's call, this or any other, implies that we have in ourselves the ability or power to do what God says. There are those who draw that conclusion, but the biblical doctrine of total depravity, that we can of ourselves do no good, and the words of scripture in Galatians 5:17 prove that it is not so, not even with Christians. Of ourselves we can do nothing.

The power to obey is in the command, and it is there because the command comes from Almighty God. Augustine understood this when he said that the command *was* the grace. This is an important truth for us all. It is important for the preacher and elders, lest they begin to think that the power of their preaching and admonitions lies in them, or that the power

to obey lies in the members of the church. Then they will begin to preach unsound doctrine, use unbiblical practices, and think themselves to be more than they are. This truth is important for those who hear the word, for they must look to God for the grace and help they need and receive the admonitions of his word.

Here God calls Judah to make the necessary preparation for their work by gathering the timber and stones needed for the work of building. For us, that house is not made of timber and stones; it is a spiritual house. Therefore, the work and the tools that belong to the building of that spiritual house are also spiritual. Nevertheless, to think of the church as a building helps us to understand how we fulfill our calling to build.

When scripture describes that spiritual house, the church, it tells us that the foundation is sound doctrine, the doctrine of the apostles and prophets. The cornerstone is Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:20–22). Believers are the living stones out of which the house is built (1 Pet. 2:4–8), and the love of the brethren is the cement that binds the stones of that house together (Col. 3:14).

Building that spiritual house means, therefore, that we ensure that the foundation is well laid in relation to Christ the chief cornerstone. That foundation is laid through the preaching of the gospel, through prayer for the ministry of the gospel, through our hearing, receiving, and submitting to the truth of the gospel, and through reading and studying the word of God both publicly and privately. In that way every member has a firm foundation for his faith and for his relationship to the other members.

Christ must be the cornerstone in all that word. The preaching must be Christ centered. Prayer must be made in his name and for his sake. The gospel must be believed and obeyed in relation to him. Through the gospel, as well as by worship, prayer, Christian fellowship, admonition, the sacraments, and church discipline, every member of the church is gathered, cut, and shaped like timber and stone and built up in faith and holiness, and all the members built up in relationship to one another.

To this work of building belong both the instruction of the church's children and the work of evangelism, including both the gathering and teaching of new converts. It is not at all difficult to see that these are essential to the work of building the church. Through them the church has the assurance

that she not only is well-built for the present but also will continue to be well-built in the future.

To the building up and rebuilding of the church belongs the work of the elders and deacons, each in their offices. When properly carried out, their work of ruling the church and of caring for the needs of the widows, the orphans, and the poor builds up the congregation in which they perform their labors. It becomes another means by which each member grows and all grow together, so that the church is strong and faithful and stands like a fortress against the assaults of Satan.

Even the work done by godly parents in the home fulfills the calling that God lays on his people in Haggai 1, as Paul so eloquently shows in the last chapters of Ephesians. That book describes the church as the body of Christ, and the closing chapters, which have to do with marriage and family life as well as with our daily work and walk in the world, are not unconnected to the rest but are part of what the Spirit has to say about the church. The man who fears Jehovah and walks in his ways will not only experience family blessedness and happiness, but also will see the good of Jerusalem, the church, all the days of his life and will experience peace in Israel (Ps. 128:5–6).

When the church has fallen into ruin and when its foundations are crumbling, the church needs to be rebuilt in the way of church reformation, whether that comes through purifying a church or through leaving an apostate church for one that is faithful. That happened in the sixteenth century through the work of Luther, Calvin, and many others. It has happened on a smaller scale at other times. It is a constant need. It is very much needed today.

The word *edification*, used so often in connection with the preaching and teaching of the church, means “building up” and refers to the strengthening and blessing of each individual believer so that through him the whole church is built up, strengthened, and blessed. Everything that is done in the church must be for “edification” (Rom. 15:2; 1 Cor. 10:23; 1 Thess. 5:11).

The calling to build belongs to every believer. Even the preaching of the gospel and church discipline are the responsibility of everyone, not just of the leaders. All are to be builders in the house of God. None may leave the work to others or be too busy with his own affairs to have any time for God’s house.

This call God urges upon Judah and upon us, upon Judah in its Old Testament typical form and upon us in its New Testament reality. He urges this call with the promise that he will take pleasure in the house and be glorified in it. For Judah that was the promise that he would reveal himself in the temple they were building as he had done in the days of Moses and of Solomon—that he would be present in all of his power and grace and goodness as the savior of his people.

For us the promise is that the church will be the place of God's covenant, where he is the God of his people and is worshiped and glorified as God. It is the promise that the church will serve the purpose for which God chose her and saved her, the glory of his own great name. It is the promise that he will rejoice in his people and they in him; that he will be their God and Father. Such encouragement is always needed. By such encouragement God himself draws us into and along the way of obedience, not as dumb beasts, but as those who have learned to know him and love him.

The reference to the mountain in verse 8 is an important part of this call to obedience. The mountain is not the place where timber for the building of God's house was to be found, but the place where God's house had to be built. The other prophets also speak of that mountain as the place where the house of God was built (Isa. 2:2; Zech. 8:3).

That mountain in scripture not only symbolizes strength and safety (Ps. 11:1), but it also testifies that the place where God dwells with his people is very high, high above this world and the things of this world. That mountain is symbolic of heaven as the real dwelling place of God with his people. Here too that is the case. God is saying to his people, "Build my house, but build it not only as the place where I will now live among you: build it in the hope of heavenly glory and of life everlasting. Build it as a place in which you are very near heaven and as a place that makes you think of heaven and look toward heaven."

1:9. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.

1:10. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.

1:11. *And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.*

In this closing section of the first prophecy, God elaborates on what he had told the Jews in verses 4–6. He reminds them of their sin, now described as the sin of every man running to his own house. That is really no different than their living in ceiled houses, but it emphasizes Israel’s complete abandonment of the work God had given them to do. They had forsaken God’s house for their own materialistic attempts to establish for themselves a place in Canaan and to become prosperous (Prov. 1:16; Ps. 119:32). Here the verb “run” is in the present tense and indicates that at the time God spoke they still had not turned from their sins. They were still running every man to his own house.

We may learn from this how difficult it is for us to see our sins. By nature we are blind especially to our own sins and can see them only when they are repeatedly pointed out by God. That is the result of our natural depravity. We ought to remember this whenever our sins are brought to our attention, whether it be by others or by God himself through his word.

God also speaks in more detail of the troubles the Jews had suffered for their sins. He explains their lack of material prosperity by telling them that the drought they had suffered was from him. Later on he speaks of other judgments (2:17), but apparently it was a drought that was the chief cause of poverty and starvation among them. The word “drought” is a play on words not evident in English. The word so translated is the same word used to describe the ruined condition of God’s house in verse 9. In effect God says, “My house lies *waste*, and therefore I have called for a *waste* upon the land.” In that way he connects the punishment with the sin and shows how the one fits the other.

God even suggests in a figure of speech that the heavens and earth agree with him concerning Judah’s sin. Literally verse 10 says, “The heavens over you refrained from dew and the earth refrained from its fruit,” as if the creation itself understood Judah’s sin and held back its gifts from an ungrateful and unrepentant nation. It was as if the creation had more regard for God

than did his own people. How sad it is when we are so spiritually insensitive to the admonitions of the gospel that even the creation becomes a witness against us by its desire to glorify God while we have no such desire.

God is showing the Jews that the drought they suffered was his judgment for their sins. Not only are all things from God, who by his providence controls and directs even the forces of nature, but they are also used to accomplish his sovereign purpose. In this case he had specifically called for a drought upon the Jews and upon their land so they might learn to obey and to see that only through obedience could they enjoy the blessing of God. This drought had been so severe that all the produce and work of their hands had been affected by it. How long it had lasted we do not know, but it had affected the cattle as well as the crops, and even the work of those who did not live as farmers and herders.

Haggai expressly mentions that this drought was a result of God's *call*. The call he speaks of is not the call of the gospel, but what is known in theology as the *vocatio realis*, the call of God through the things that are made. That call of God in the creation is one of the ways in which he makes himself known even today. Paul speaks of that call in Romans 1:19–20:

19. Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

20. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

As we learn from these verses and in the word of God through Haggai, that call, or witness of God in the creation, is a witness against the wickedness of men and has no saving power. Apart from God's grace and the saving work of the Holy Spirit, that call only leaves men without excuse. Here, in order that his people might not only be reminded of their sins but also might obey and turn from their wickedness, that call of God through the creation is accompanied by the call of the gospel through the mouth of Haggai.

For us in the New Testament church, the drought suffered is not a lack of

dew and of the fruits of the ground, but a spiritual drought and famine, such as the word of God describes in Psalm 106:15 and in Amos 8:11: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.” This kind of famine and drought came on the church of the Old Testament in the period between Malachi and the coming of Christ. For four hundred years or more the word of God was not heard in Israel. It comes also on the church today when she does not heed God’s word and has no care for his house.

Such famine is common in the church. There was a long spiritual famine in the years before the Reformation. There have been periods of famine in more modern times, especially in the nineteenth century, when apostasy and liberalism held sway in the churches. It is not uncommon these days, for in some places and in some churches the word of God, read, sung, and preached, is hardly to be heard. Sermons, even where they are not open heresy or the words of men, are not biblical—no longer God’s word to his people. The Bible is little read and less studied and its fountains of living water little desired, and folk are so dull and so unspiritual that few realize the days of famine prophesied by Amos have come. Certainly they do not see in such famine the judgment of God for disobedience and neglect of his house and covenant.

All this is summed up in the opening words of verse 9: “Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it.” How true that is in these last days. Every Christian expects much when he reads the promises of God’s word, but how little profit and blessing there really is. How little peace and happiness, how little knowledge of God, how little enjoyment of the riches of grace and salvation! How little godliness and piety, how little blessing in family life and in marriage! God blows upon our spiritual harvests and leaves us impoverished and hungry.

Insofar as the word of God is still heard and read and prayer offered, little comes of it because for the most part the church is disobedient to God and almost completely disinterested in seeing his house built up. God will not allow us to enjoy the blessings we do have and the spiritual privileges that still remain if we neglect his house and the glory of his name in that house.

1:12. Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, 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 did fear before the LORD.

This historical notice, the first of two in the book of Haggai, is the occasion for a renewed promise of blessing. The obedience of the people to the word of God through Haggai is recorded in this verse and is the reason for the four words of encouragement (two words in Hebrew) that follow in verse 13, "I am with you." The blessing of God is experienced and enjoyed only through obedience to his commands: a simple lesson, but not often learned.

Zerubbabel and Joshua are mentioned first because they took the lead in obeying God's word. They were so important to the work that Ezra 5:2 does not even mention the people but these two men only. Their leadership, however, is not only an example of what every leader in the church, minister, elder, or deacon, ought to do and how he ought to lead the people in obedience to God. It also reminds us that ultimately it is Christ himself who leads us in obedience to God, not only by his own example, but also by giving us the grace of obedience. These men, in their offices, are pictures of Christ as the king and priest of God's people, who atones for all their disobedience and sends them his Spirit to lead them in the right way.

We should note that the name Joshua is really the same name as Jesus, Joshua being the Hebrew version of the name, and Jesus the Greek version. And we should remember that Zerubbabel was of the royal line of David and an ancestor of our Lord. Not only as David's heir but also as governor of God's people he foreshadows him who governs the church in perfect righteousness.

The people are described as the remnant, not as "this people." When they were disobedient they were "this people," but when obedient they are "the remnant." By the name remnant God shows that he still cares for them just as he had when he brought them back from Babylon, even though they were few in number (fewer than fifty thousand had returned from Babylon). He reminds the people that he was aware of their small numbers and their difficulties. For us that name remnant is a reminder that the church is always only a little flock, but that her size and condition are known to God, who helps and preserves her. Her size and insignificance, however, do not in any

way excuse her from her calling to be built up as a spiritual temple and a dwelling place of God.

Of this remnant one commentator says:

Those who are trying to obey God's Word and put it into practice in these days are the faithful remnant. So many who think of themselves as God's people are just asleep to God's voice. They will not stir themselves to leave their "Babylon". They are comfortable in their surroundings. They are not bothered by the ungodliness of their associates. They see no need to obey the call to "come out from them and be separate" (2 Corinthians 6:17).

But the remnant today are characterized by a concern to listen carefully to God's Word and a desire to apply it to their church and personal lives. They are not happy to allow the thinking and desires of the ungodly world to dominate their lives and their Christian fellowships. They are concerned to maintain a purity of doctrine in their churches and they want to do all they can to follow the teaching of the Word of God. Above all, they repent deeply of their past complacency and endeavor to place God's Word at the centre of their thoughts and actions.⁵

That God speaks to the people as well as to the leaders is a striking reminder of the calling that every believer has toward the church. Very often the members think the work of the church is solely the responsibility of the leaders, and the members are content merely to fill the pews and go along with whatever the leaders decide, or to blame them when things go wrong. Especially in the New Testament, because we are all priests and kings (Rev. 1:6), we are all equally responsible for the life and work of the church. We are all builders.

Church discipline is a good example. Long before sins come to the attention of the elders and through them to the attention of the whole congregation, it is the responsibility of every member to be busy admonishing his fellow believers and to be heeding their admonitions. Even when

⁵ Michael Bentley, *Building for God's Glory: Haggai and Zechariah Simply Explained* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 1989), 43.

a particular sin comes under the formal discipline of the church, it is the responsibility of every member to be praying for the errant brother and admonishing him to turn from his sin and repent. If that is not done, discipline is incomplete, even if the elders fulfill their responsibility and the sinner is excommunicated. Indeed, if it is not done, there is little chance that the elders will continue to do their work in admonishing, censuring, and excommunicating the wayward, or that the wayward sinner will respond to discipline and repent.

That all the people are commanded to be busy with this work of building is striking because in the Old Testament, generally speaking, the ordinary people of God were far less responsible than we. For the most part the work of the Old Testament church belonged to the kings, priests, and prophets whom God gave them, and the people were largely passive spectators in worship, prayer, sacrificing, and serving God.

God tells us again that he sent Haggai, a fact as important today as it was then. Those whom God chooses to bring his word must be sent. Romans 10:15 asks, "How shall they preach, except they be sent?" Unless they are commissioned and sent by God himself, they have no right to expect that the people will listen to and obey the word of God through them.

In the New Testament that commissioning is not direct, as it was in the Old Testament, but comes through the church. Paul and his fellow laborers did not begin their work as missionaries until they were sent by the church in Antioch, and by the Spirit through the church. Those who are not so sent have no commission from God.

When the people feared before the Lord, they understood that God was speaking through Haggai and that they must obey him or perish. This fear is not the terror the ungodly experience when they come face to face with God's wrathful judgments, but an awe and reverence of God, mixed with the love of God, that recognizes one's own sin and creatureliness and the great glory and holiness of God, trembles before him, and obeys him.

Obedience to God is always rooted in the fear of God. Obedience is such a rare virtue in the church because God in all his glory is not known, nor his judgments understood. He is viewed for the most part, if known at all, as one like us, who can be spoken of as we speak of our fellows and who can be met and talked to as one meets and speaks to a casual acquaintance.

Only when the fear of God is born again in the hearts of God's people will obedience to God follow.

The fear of God has his approval and blessing. He proves that in Isaiah 66:2: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." The fear of God is pleasing to him because it is always the fruit of his own grace. He cannot and does not despise his own work in his people.

Obedience and fear are produced by the word of God. The word "then" suggests this: "*Then...*[they] obeyed the voice of the Lord their God" (v. 12, emphasis added). The word of God has that power because it comes from God. Its power is the same as the power of God's creative word by which he called the things that were not as though they were (Rom. 4:17). The word of God is its own power and produces that which it requires. That is always a reason the word of God must be preached, and only the word.

1:13. Then spake Haggai the LORD's messenger in the LORD's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD.

The word of encouragement Haggai brings to the people, who were now obeying God's command to rebuild the temple, is simple and short but contains all that the people needed to hear. It is for Judah the promise that the temple, though far less glorious than Solomon's, would be the house of God himself, who would live among his people there, bless them from that place, and keep covenant with them.

God speaks in the present tense and says, "I am with you."⁶ He promises to help them and to bless them, but even suggests that his presence preceded their obedience—that he had never truly left them. In no other way could they possibly have obeyed or been stirred up out of their sloth.

The word "then" reinforces the truth that blessing and obedience are inseparable. We like to think we can have God's blessing while going our own way, but it never happens. God is not mocked by sin. What a man sows he also reaps (Gal. 6:7). Blessing is only for those who obey, and the sooner we learn such an important truth the better off we will be. Obedience does

⁶ The word "am" is not in the Hebrew (note the italics), but that is certainly the idea here, as the King James Version (KJV) suggests.

not earn God's blessing, but God works no other way than in the way of teaching his people to obey and then blessing them.

The promise God gives them is the formula for the covenant in scripture. That covenant, the relationship between God and his people, is always described in such terms: that God is the God of his people and is with them and that he takes them as his people. That promise is realized fully in the new heavens and earth (Rev. 21:3), but it is enjoyed now in the church as the body of Christ and the house of God and through obedience to God's commands.

The Lord fulfilled that promise as well. Ezra tells us that the eye of the Lord was on them to protect them from their enemies and to turn the heart of the king to favor their cause, so that the things they needed for the work were provided by his decree. God's words of encouragement are not empty as ours are but are the powerful, helping, saving words of the Almighty. These words are like the words of blessing with which many New Testament books begin. Like them, these words actually bring God's richest blessing to his people.

The words Haggai brought are the heart of every word of encouragement God gives us. He does not tell us what is ahead; he never tries to reassure us by minimizing future difficulties or by promising that there will be none. All he ever really says is this: "I am with you." We must remember his promise in our work and not judge the value and profit by visible results, by the presence or lack of difficulties, or by our own perceptions of the work.

This encouragement is given especially for the church and is given because God loves his church for Christ's sake. Article 27 of the Belgic Confession says this and states:

This Church hath been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof...[and] is preserved or supported by God against the rage of the whole world; though she sometimes (for a while) appear very small, and, in the eyes of men, to be reduced to nothing.⁷

⁷ Belgic Confession 27, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 3:417.

Notice too that this encouragement is given immediately upon evidence of repentance. God does not put his people on probation when they repent of their sins but blesses them without delay, a great encouragement to repentance.

Haggai is called here the Lord's "messenger" and his word of encouragement the Lord's "message." The word "messenger" or "message" is, in the Old Testament, the same word often translated as "angel" (Gen. 16:7; 19:1; etc.). It can therefore be used as a general term for any messenger or for those special messengers who live in the presence of God in heaven. That "messenger" is used here for Haggai is somewhat surprising, because he is always elsewhere referred to as a prophet. It says that the message of comfort he brings is heavenly.

1:14. And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God,

1:15. In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

The recorded date is not merely a historical record but proof that the obedience of Judah was without delay, as all obedience to God ought to be. Within a month's time the people were once again busy with God's work after a lapse of about twenty years. Their previous disobedience and sloth had proved them unwilling and unable to obey. The credit for their new obedience must therefore be given to the grace of God, supplied through his prophetic word and worked by his Spirit in the hearts of his people. Haggai's contemporary Zechariah speaks of that in chapter 4 of his prophecy: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (v. 6).

Nor did the people wait until the decree of Artaxerxes was repealed. The story is told in Ezra 5 and 6. Tatnai, the governor of the territory in which Judah was found, investigated the news that they were building again and wrote the king, suggesting that it would be in his best interest to have the work stopped. He also reported the words of the people who had said that Cyrus had sent them to rebuild the temple. When investigation was

made in Babylon, it was discovered that the Jews had spoken the truth. Cyrus had decreed the rebuilding of the temple and sent them to Judah to do it, and so Darius not only forbade the governor from interfering, but also commanded him to give the people everything they needed for the work and for sacrifices. Thus God showed he was with them. But the people did not wait for the matter to be investigated or for the decree of King Darius, but began and continued the work in obedience to God.

That is the nature of true obedience always. It does not wait for men, not even for kings and rulers, nor does it fear them and their decrees, but insists that God has spoken and what he has said must be done, no matter what the consequences. Such obedience has brought much suffering to God's people, but it is the only kind of obedience that is pleasing to God. Obedience that waits for a favorable season or for the approval of men is no obedience at all.

Such obedience is always the fruit of God's own grace, as evidenced in the testimony of these verses. The people and their leaders obeyed because God stirred up their spirits. He did that by his word through Haggai and by the internal work of the Holy Spirit. His word is always quick and powerful and is the way in which he gives his grace to us, not only at the beginning of our Christian life but also daily. May he ever so stir up the spirits of his people to obey and to come and work in the house of the Lord their God, that is, in the church, which is the house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).

A stirred-up spirit is characterized by the fear of the Lord. Such fear is not the slavish terror of those who hate God and who come under his judgments, but a fear that trembles in awe and reverence before the presence of his majesty. Such fear is sadly lacking among Christians today, and this is the result of a lack of knowledge of God and his glory. Such fear is necessary if ever we are to understand the importance of his house and the urgency of our calling to work in his house.

Judah showed this fear of God when they once again put his glory and his house first and set it above their earthly concerns. They showed the fear of God when they turned to God in repentance and conversion, seeing in the Lord's holiness a reason to turn from sin.

A stirred-up spirit is also characterized by quick and ready obedience. That was so in the case of the people of Judah. It is the case also now. A

stirred-up spirit does not make excuses, does not procrastinate, does not continue idle, indifferent, and careless, but immediately does what God requires. Such stirred-up spirits are a great necessity in the church of Jesus Christ, for without them, the people of God will continue to run to their own houses.

Such stirred-up spirits are the work and gift of the Holy Spirit and are given when the Holy Spirit applies Christ and his work to God's people. The Spirit, in other words, does not stir up their spirits by some secret and hidden operation but by showing them the loveliness of Christ and of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. God does that here by the promise, "I am with you," a promise that is really the promise of Immanuel, God with us.

Stirred-up spirits are much needed and seldom found in the church today. People are often stirred up, but by the wrong things and for the wrong ends. They can be much stirred up about turning the church into a soup kitchen, about entertaining the young folk, about speaking in tongues and doing miracles, but few are stirred up at the thought of fellowship with the living God or by a desire to see his house built and prosperous, to see him worshiped there as he commands in his word. These Jews, as we ought to be, were stirred up by a desire to obey God, to work in his house, and to enjoy once again the fellowship and blessedness of his covenant in that house. May God by his Spirit so stir up ours.

Note, finally, that for the first time in the prophecy God identifies himself as the God of his people, "their God," not because his favor and relationship to them depend on their obedience, but because it is only in the way of obedience that his people know and can believe that he is "their God." How wonderful, after all his former threats and judgments, to know again and be reassured that he looks with favor on his people and accepts them as his own!