

Place: Lurgan Baptist 6:10:2015

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: Haggai 1:1-15

38. THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

Two men who lived in New York City decided that they had it with city living. So they bought a ranch down in Texas in order to live off the land like their ancestors. The first thing they decided they needed was a mule. So they went to a neighbouring rancher and asked him if he had a mule to sell for ploughing. The rancher answered, “*No I am afraid not.*” They were disappointed but one of them saw some honey dew melons stacked against the barn and asked, “*what are those ?*” The rancher seeing that they were city slickers, decided to have some fun. “*Oh,*” he answered “*those are mule eggs. You take one of those eggs home and you wait for it to hatch and you'll have a mule.*” Well, the two men from New York were overjoyed at this so they bought one of the melons and headed down the bumpy country road toward their own ranch. Suddenly they hit a large bump on the road, and the melon bounced out of the back of the pickup truck, hit the road and burst open.

Seeing what happened in his mirror the driver turned the truck around to see if he could retrieve his mule egg. Meanwhile a big old Texas jackrabbit came hopping by and saw this melon burst in the road. He hopped over to it and standing in the middle of that mess he began to eat.

Then along came the men from New York. One of them shouted, “*Our mule egg has hatched let's get our mule.*” But seeing those two men run towards it, the jackrabbit took off hopping in every direction with the two men in hot pursuit. They gave everything they could to catch it but finally they could go no further. Gasping for breath one of them said to the other, “*Well I guess we lost our mule.*” The other nodded and said, “*Yes, but you know, I am not sure I wanted to plough that fast anyway.*” Let me ask you as you begin this new session in the Bible Class, how committed are you ? It was Jonathan Edward's who said, “*I go to preach with two propositions. First, every person ought to give his life to Christ. Second, whether or not anyone else gives Him his life I will give Him mine.*” That's **commitment**. It was the Lord Jesus who said, “*Father I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.*” (Jn 17:4) That's **commitment**. Today, however commitment is a bad word especially in the local church.

I heard of a pastor who met one of his delinquent members and said, “*Well I haven't seen you in church much lately.*” “*No,*” he said, “*you know how it's been. The children have been sick, and then it's rained, rained, and rained.*” The pastor said, “*Well it's always dry at church.*” “*Yes,*” he said “*that's another reason why I haven't been coming.*” The mood of God's people **at this time** was one of apathy and indifference. Can you imagine the scene at this building site in Jerusalem ? Fifteen years have passed since any work has been done. The weeds and nettles have grown over the foundation of the temple, and the general impression is one of

desolation and neglect. But then God stirred His people through the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah and they got about the task of rebuilding the temple. Now there are six books in the Old Testament which have to do with the Jews being in captivity in Babylon. Three of these books are in the historical section of your Bible, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. The other three books are in the prophetic section of your Bible. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Those six books have to do with this period of time known as the Captivity and the return of the Jews to the land of promise. As we come to Haggai I want you to think about,

1. THE PERSON:

His name means “*festal one*,” and it’s been suggested that Haggai was born on a feast day. Some feel that he had seen the glory of Solomon’s Temple before it was destroyed, making him at least 70 years of age when writing this prophecy. (2:3) Haggai only spoke for three or four months and then he was finished. His book is the second shortest book in the Old Testament, with only Obadiah being shorter. 1.

2. THE PLACE:

Look at (1:1) You see, from this statement that the Time was right: “*In the sixth month in the first day of the month*,” the year was 520 B.C. “*Came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet*,” so the Man was right. “*Unto Zerubbabel, governor of Judah*,” so the Place was right. 1, 2,

3. THE PERIOD:

For this last three books of the Old Testament take us into the post-exilic period. Do you recall that in 538 B.C. Cyrus issued a decree that the Jews could return to their homeland under the civil leadership of Zerubbabel and the spiritual guidance of Joshua the high priest (Ezra 3:2) Immediately about 50,000 responded (Ezra 1:1) and in 535 B.C. they began to rebuild the temple (Ezra 3:1-4:5) but opposition from without and discouragement from within caused the work to cease and for 15 years (535 B.C to 520.B.C. not another brick was added to the building. Then Haggai and his contemporary Zechariah were commissioned by the Lord to stir up the people, to not only rebuild the temple but to reorder their spiritual priorities. (Ezra 5:1-6:22) As a result the temple was completed four years later (516 B.C.) You see, this is,

4. THE PURPOSE:

Of the book. To encourage the people of God, to get back to the rebuilding of the Temple. (1:8 Ezra 6:14) R.G. Lee the famous American preacher says, “*Haggai’s message is full of stirring words to us to today. If as a church we thought more of the Lord’s work than of our comfort, there would be no lack of means to carry it forward.*”

5. THE PATTERN:

For the book falls into four parts with the date of Haggai’s prophecy firmly fixed. Will you notice from (1:1) that he wrote in the second year of Darius 1 which was 520 B.C.

You see, Haggai assigned a date to each of his four prophecies all given within four months of each other.

1. The First Message was preached on the 29th August, in 520 B.C. (1:1)
2. The Second Message was preached on the 17th October in 520 B.C. (2:1)
3. The Third Message was preached on the 18th December in 520 B.C. (2:10)
4. The Fourth Message was preached on the 18th December in 520 B.C. (2:20)

So here we have four messages preached within a period of four months and those messages were directed to Zerubbabel the governor of Judah, Joshua the High Priest (1:1 2:2, 21) and the people of Judah (1:13) So here is Haggai with the shortest ministry of any prophet, only four months. But it resulted in some of the greatest work, because it was the Lords work that was being done. Now what I want to do this evening is to take those four messages delivered over a period of four months and leave them with you.

(1) The 1st Message was Directed to the Hands of the People 1:1-15

We could summarize it with the word **Practical**: Look at (1:7-8) One of the key words of the prophecy is the word “ *consider*.” These people were to give careful thought to their ways and take a good hard look at their lifestyle. (2:15.18) Well, what is God actually saying to them anyhow ? Well, notice the chapter begins with,

(a) *THE REBUKE TO THE PEOPLE:*

Look if you will at (1:1-2) Isn't it interesting that God did not refer to them as “ *His people*,” but as “ *this people*,” (1:2) If anyone during those fifteen odd years had raised the question, “ *Do you not think we ought to do something about starting work on God's house again ?*” the people would have said, “ *Oh, the time is not right.*” Then they would have come up with all sorts of excuses as to why the time was not right. Billy Sunday called an excuse “ *the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie*,” and Benjamin Franklin wrote, “ *I never knew a man who was good at making excuses who was good at anything else.*” You see, a spirit of apathy and indolence had crept over them from which they could not seem to rouse themselves, and so the work of God remained at a standstill.

My this was not something unique to the Jews of that time. For most of my ministry I have heard different believers say, “ *it's not a good time to be or do something for God.*” An apathetic spirit that says, “ *I cannot be bothered*,” pervades the local church today. Do you ever Christians talk like that in relation to their **Worship ?** Could it be that apathy has crept into your life ? Perhaps you no longer attend public worship as regularly as once you did. One growing sign of apathy is the gradual decline of the Sunday evening service right across our province. Maybe you are not seen as often at the prayer meeting or the Bible Class. Could it be that you are no longer consistent in your personal prayer time and the reading of the Word ? “ *The time is not just right, the economy is*

*bad, the family are demanding, I am just so tired.” Are you full of excuses this ? “ The time is not come,” do you ever believers talk like that in relation to their Work ? When you talk about evangelism and winning people to Christ, there are some who say, “ *It’s not the right time to do that. It’s hard to win folk to the Lord. We’re living in the last days. Wait till there is more unity in the assembly.*” My is this not the way we talk ? No, hurry about the Lord’s work, no urgency about prayer, plenty of time for soul-winning. Is that your attitude ? This was the attitude of gruff old Dr. Ryland of Northampton when he rebuked the young William Carey with the words, “ *Young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, He’ll do it without your aid or mine.*” What a paralyzing idea that is. My the cults put us to shame with their enthusiasm and zeal and we stand among the ruins of the temple and say, “ *the time is not come.*” Yet the Lord Jesus says, “ *Say not ye there are yet four months and then cometh harvest ? behold I say unto you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields they are white already to harvest.*”(Jn 4:35) (a)*

(b) THE RESOURCES AMONG THE PEOPLE:

Where had all their obsession with getting and having brought them to ? Well, look at (1:5-6) Their agriculture failed: “ *Ye have sown much and bring in little,*” (1:6) The economy of the land was not sufficient to meet the people’s needs: “ *Ye eat but ye have not enough, ye drink but ye are not filled with drink, ye clothe yourselves but there is none warm.*” Inflation was spiraling out of

control: “ *And he that earneth wages earnest wages to put it into a bag with holes,*” (1:6) Joyce Baldwin says, “ ***Their money disappeared like flour through a sieve.***” Like the bumper sticker says, “ *My take home pay will not take me home.*” Now why was this ? Well, look at (1:9) God says, “ *When you stopped building, I stopped blessing. If you want my blessings then get back to building my house. Get your priorities right and everything will fall into place. Make the main thing, the main thing.*” In the words of the Saviour, “ *But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.*” (Matt 6:33) What things ? All that they needed.

It was as if the Lord was saying to them, “ ***You say the time is not right to build my house. But I notice you give plenty of time to building and refurbishing your own houses with decorative paneling and other extras.***” Not that it was wrong in any sense for the people to furnish their homes tastefully, and to provide themselves with certain comforts. The point Haggai was making was that these things had taken over their lives and had become more important to them than the things of God.

You see, their sense of priorities had become distorted, and as a result the Lord had withheld His blessing. (1:5-6) Someone has defined worldliness as “ that state in which our thinking is governed by the mind and outlook of the world.” Is that not what happened in Paul’s day ? Do you recall when he wrote to the church at Philippi ? He spoke of young Timothy. He says, “ *I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all*

seek their own (interests) not the things which are Jesus Christ's." (Phil 2:20-21) As Paul looked around him in Rome the general run of believers were of that self-seeking spirit that degrades the Lord Jesus to second place. Living for time instead of eternity, living for self instead of for God, living for the temporal, instead of the eternal. Can that not so easily happen to us ? Our homes and families, our jobs and careers, our interests and pleasures, can all displace and jeopardize the work of God in our lives to the extent that the Lord Himself becomes marginalized. Is this, what has happened to you ? Has your life become so cluttered with other things that the Lord is now secondary ? Have you not time for reflection on the things of God ? Has the Lord to compete with all these other things to get a foothold in your life ?

Well, the Lord is saying to you this "*Consider your ways,*" (1:3,7,) "*Give very careful thought in reflecting on your priorities. Make the proper adjustments and follow the Lord's will.*" Now it seems they did, for "*all the remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the words of Haggai the prophet,*" (1:12) You see, this was,

(c) THE RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE:

Look if you will at (1:14) My this could not have been easy because for 15 years the temple had lay desolate. But on 21st September 520 B.C. just 23 days later the work of God was resumed. Judah had responded to Haggai's message but it took three weeks to plan the work and prepare the materials. I mean they responded

Promptly: In less than a month after Haggai had delivered his soul (Haggai 1:1, 14) they had resumed the work. My when God's Word stirs you, do you obey promptly or are you merely a sermon taster, just a "*hearer of the Word.*" (James 1:22) They responded **Properly:** Zerubbabel, the civic leader, Jeshua the spiritual leader, take the initiative. **You see, a people can only rise as high as the leadership is willing to take them.** But do you see here the effect of God's Word ? The work resumed. My how quickly situations can change when the Spirit of God is present. Is this not what we desperately need ? For the Spirit of God to stir our spirit with an all-consuming zeal for the work of God and the gospel of Christ ? We need to pray with Amy Carmichael,

**Give me the love that leads the way
The faith that nothing can dismay
The hope no disappointments tire
The passion that will burn like fire
Let me not sink to be a clod
Make me Thy fuel, O Flame of God.**

(2) The Second Message was Directed to the Hearts of the People 2:1-9

We could summarize it with the word **Emotional**. For emotions were running high. You see, this second message came just 27 days after they had begun building. Morale was declining because the older people were making comparisons with Solomon's Temple. You see,

(a) THE PAST:

Is brought before us in (2:3) You see, when they laid the foundation some 15 years before, the older men had wept because they remembered the glory of Solomon's temple, (Ezra 3:13) and now some of the people were discouraged because the new temple lacked splendor and glory. As the walls went up the people's spirits came down for Zerubbabel's temple paled in splendor to King Solomon's. 9 586 B.C.) “ *Call this is a temple ? You should have seen the temple we had.*” We are all familiar with the “ *good old days,*” syndrome, the tendency to look back to the past through rose coloured spectacles. My we can learn from the past, but we are not live in the past. If you're not very careful you'll get yourself caught up talking about the “ *good ole days.*” Like the little girl listening to her Granny reading the great stories of the Bible and saying, “ *Wasn't God exciting then, Granny ?*”

My are you tempted to think that God is no longer exciting, that all His great deeds are in the past ? Are you like these old timers here ? “ *I remember when,*” “ *I remember when Pastor Mullan was here, why there were souls saved each Sunday night. I remember when the Bible Class was packed to capacity. I remember when the prayer meeting was jammed.*” “ *I remember when,*” I heard about a man who wrote a letter to the editor of the newspaper. He said, “ *Your paper is not as good as it used to be.*” The editor wrote under it, “ *Our paper never was as good as it used to be.*” Some folk are always talking about their past experiences. But what is God doing for you now ? Is God using and blessing you

today ? Is your experience of God's salvation richer now than it was twenty years ago ? (a) And then,

(b) *THE PRESENT:*

Someone has said that “ *encouragement is oxygen to the soul,*” and Haggai encouraged them to finish the project telling them to “ *Be strong (take courage) and work for I am with thee saith the Lord of hosts.*” (2:4) Did you notice the threefold repetition “ *Be strong,*” ? They were to get on and finish the work they had begun. It is easy to begin anything whether a building, a project or a particular calling, but to continue and finish it is the important thing. Could I be speaking to someone and your morale is low ? Have you written out your resignation ? Could I ask you, who are you doing it for ? You see, these people should have been encouraged because they had,

1. The Presence of God:

“ *Be strong all ye people of the land, saith the Lord and work, for I am with you saith the Lord of hosts according to the word that I covenanted with when ye came out of Egypt,*” (2:5) God had covenanted to shepherd them during the 40 years in the wilderness and to give them the land of Canaan as well. Is this not the confidence that we have in the Lord's work ? The Lord is with you, as you teach the kids, reach the lost, and visit the sick. 1.

2. The Power of God:

“ *My Spirit remaineth among you fear ye not,*” (2:5) You see, apart from the power of the Holy Spirit our labour’s are in vain. (Phil 2:13) If we are too strong in ourselves the Lord cannot use us. That’s what ruined King Uzziah, “ *for he was marvellously helped till he was strong.*” (2 Chron 27: 15) My as you step forward seeking to build God’s spiritual temple (1 Cor 6:19) out of the ruins of fallen humanity, be encouraged the Lord is with you and the Lord is in you. But Haggai also focuses on,

(c) ***THE FUTURE:***

In (2:6-9) Just when will this shaking take place ? Well, surely this prophecy about shaking all nature is prophetic in scope. I mean does this not refer to the Messiah’s Second Advent when God will “ *shake the heavens and the earth,*” (2:21 Joel 3:16 Matt 24:29 Rev 16:18, 20) and will destroy Gentile world power. (2:22 Dan 2:34-35, 44-45 Heb 12:26-27) Violent shaking indeed. And a people in the care of a covenant keeping God who is able to shake all nature and all nations with equal ease, need not fear. The Lord says, “ *And I will shake all nations and the desire of all nations shall come,*” (2:7) In both Jewish and Christian tradition the phrase “ *the desire of all nations,*” has been generally interpreted as a Messianic title of Christ. Whether people recognize it or not, He is the One for whom the human heart yearns. All creation groans and travails in longing for Him. (Rom 8:19-22) He is the only One who could fulfil their desire for peace on the earth. (2:9)

Now it seems that the glory referred in (2:7) is the glory that Christ brought to the temple in Jerusalem. (Lk 2:21-24) But the glory in (2:9) refers to the glory of the millennial temple that will function during Christ’s reign on earth. (Ezek 40-48 Is 60:1-5) You see, the millennial temple will be built after the shaking of (2:6) For while the Lord came in grace to the courts of Zerubbabel’s Temple. Ezekiel’s temple will be connected with peace that will bless the world when Jesus Christ reigns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (1) (2)

(3) **The Third Message was Directed to the Holiness of the People 2:10-19**

We could summarize it with the word **Spiritual**. You see, God not only demands that we serve Him (1:1-15) but that our service be unspoiled by sin. Although the people had turned to the Lord on 21st September 520 B.C. (1:14) the effects of God’s past judgments were still being felt. He had smitten the land with “ *blight (scorching wind) and with mildew and with hail.*” (2:17) This past judgment had not produced national repentance for the Lord said “ *yet ye turned not to me.*” (2:17) You see, the people may have thought themselves holy because they were back in the Holy Land and the Holy City, offering sacrifices on the restored altar in Jerusalem, but in fact they were defiled because of their disobedience. They expected God’s blessing the very day they began the work on the temple, but now it was December and things were still difficult. (2:15-19) Haggai explained why the Lord had not blessed them.

They were still unclean. You see,

(a) *CLEAN DOES NOT MAKE DIRTY CLEAN:*

Do you see the first question ? (2:12) The “ *holy flesh*, ” was that portion set aside to be sacrificed to the Lord. Often a priest carried the sacrifice in his robe, which meant that his garment became holy. (Lev 6:27) So Haggai questioned, if the holy flesh touched other food, was holiness transferred to them as well ? The priests answered “ *No*, ” for holiness can be transferred to items of food. (a) A healthy person cannot pass on his good health to a sick person. (a) But,

(b) *DIRTY DOES MAKE CLEAN DIRTY:*

For look at (2:13 Lev 11:28 22:4-7) The Law of Moses taught that moral cleanness cannot be transmitted but moral uncleanness can. In other words, holiness is not catching but uncleanness is. *You cannot give someone your holiness or health but you can give someone your uncleanness and sickness.* Dirty people building a clean temple made the new temple dirty in God’s sight. No wonder the Lord said, “ *So is this people and so is this nation before me saith the Lord.* ” (2:14) My have we grasp the principle, that God is not so much concerned about what we do for Him, but whether we are clean to do it ? Do you realize that sin hinders the work of God ? Do you recognize that sin robs us of the blessings of God ? It was the sins of the people that brought about the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the nation.

It was sin that hindered the rebuilding of the Temple and the renewing of the Nation. For “ *righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people.* ” (Prov 14:34) Tell me, are you serving the Lord with unclean hands and hearts ? Are you living as if God winked at sin, ? Do you think that because you are working for the Lord that He will continue to bless you ? Now once the nation had been cleansed, God promised to bless them. (2:19) He gave them His Word, “ *From this day I will bless you.* ” (2:19) Will you notice that the final message preached the same day as the third message was directed to the governor personally. So,

(4) The Fourth Message was Directed to the Hopes of the People 2:20-23

We could summarize it with the word **Prophetical**. For Haggai announced that Israel’s enemies would be judged and the long expected Messianic blessing would come to the nation. In other words, there would be,

(a) *THE GREAT TRIBULATION:*

Do you see (2:21-22) ? Perhaps Zerubbabel saw the great empires around him, and he feared for the tiny remnant of the Jews. Circumstances have a way of discouraging us as we seek to build the work of the Lord. But God encouraged the governor’s faith. “ *I will shake the heavens and the earth,* ” God said. “ *Don’t be afraid of these kingdoms. I will overthrow them and destroy them.* ” Were the nations around Jerusalem larger and stronger ? Rest assured that the Lord will care for His people Israel

as He always has done in the past. The same God who enabled Moses to defeat Egypt and Joshua to conquer Canaan would protect His people so that His purposes could be fulfilled through them. Israel will endure until the last days, and then the Lord will defeat her enemies and establish her in her kingdom. (a) But notice,

(b) THE GLORIOUS ELEVATION:

For look at how the book ends. (2:23) The word “*signet*” speaks of authority and honour. The signet was used as a person’s signature. It was used to validate royal authority within the document sealed. (1 Kings 21:8) It was used as a guarantee to fulfil a future promise. (Gen 38:18) In Biblical times it was worn on the right hand (Jer 22:24) or around the neck. You see, God was saying, “*Zerubbabel you are as a signet, a very precious jewel to me. I have chosen you, don’t give up.*” Now Zerubbabel was of the royal line, he was the grandson of King Jehoiachin (Jeconiah Matt 1:12 Coniah Jer22:24) He was an ancestor of the Lord Jesus, his name being listed in the genealogies (Matt 1:12 Lk 3:27) In fact these words find their ultimate fulfilment in His descendant, the Lord Jesus. For God gave His royal signet ring, His seal of authority and placed it on the finger of Jesus Christ, who will finally rule all nations of the world.

What a word of encouragement in a day of darkness. It speaks not only to the people of Jerusalem as they build the Temple but it speaks to us today, in our age of darkness, as the events of the world lead us closer and closer to the climax of history, “*the day of the Lord.*”

My God wants us to know that today is the time for building. He says “*Be strong and work, for I am with you saith the Lord of hosts.*” (2:4) We are working on a “**Temple,**” for God’s glory, but it is not made of stone and cedar. The church body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor 6:19) Are you doing all you can to build the house of the Lord ? Or are you sitting among the ruins saying, “*the time is not come, the time that the Lord’s house should be built.*” (1:2) Listen, the obligations face us today. Souls are perishing today. Others need a helping hand today. How will you respond ? Will you continue to put self ahead of God, look back instead of looking ahead, cover your sin instead of confessing it, live for time instead of eternity ? My grasp the wonderful promises in this book. “*I am with you,*” (1:13) “*Fear ye not,*” (2:5) “*I will bless you,*” (2:19) “*I have chosen you.*” Rise up and do the work of the Lord.

**Facing a task unfinished
That drives us to our knees
A need that undiminished
Rebukes our slothful ease
We, who rejoice to know Thee
Renew before Thy throne
The solemn pledge we owe Thee
To go and make Thee known**