

HAGGAI – THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS MESSAGES FOR TODAY

Haggai was an Old Testament prophet from God whose messages to the Jews of that era addressed problems common to the people of God in all ages. They are still evident among Christians today. The primary theme of Haggai's messages is building God's house (CP Hag 1:1-15). This is Haggai's first message. V2-5 addresses the first problem – the Jews' selfish lack of concern for God's house while building luxury houses for themselves. God rebuked them for being so preoccupied with their own houses while His house lay in ruins (CP V2-5). This is a clear warning for Christians today not to live self-centred lives but to diligently apply themselves to the work of God. For the Old Testament Jews building God's house meant rebuilding His earthly house – the temple (CP V7-8). For Christians today building God's house means building God's spiritual house – the church – by winning souls to Christ and advancing God's kingdom in the earth (CP Mt 16:18 with 28:19-20; Mk 16:15-16; Ac 1:6-8; 10:42-45; 19:8; 28:23, 30-31; Col 1:3-6). Winning souls to Christ and advancing God's kingdom in the earth must be the priority of every professing Christian. It is not an option for Christians, but a command. God's rebuke to the Jews in V2-5 in Hag 1 for their lack of concern with building His house while building their own luxury houses is for our admonition also. This is a warning to Christians today against self-centred living, ignoring their responsibility to advance God's kingdom in the earth.

Because of their self-seeking lifestyles and lack of concern for His house, God withheld His blessings from the Jews which affected everything they did. They sowed big but brought in little. There was barely enough to eat and drink. Their clothes were not warm enough to keep out the cold. They earned good wages but never has enough money – it was as through their pockets had holes and the money fell through the holes. The harder they worked the less they made. There were no accruing benefits from anything they did – it was all futile because they had ignored their responsibility to do what God required of them (CP Hag 1:6, 9-11). This correlation between the Jew's commitment to the work of God and the enjoyment of His blessings, extends to Christians today too. The consummate blessing for them is eternal life, which they will forfeit if they live self-centred lives, ignoring their responsibility to do the work of God's word (CP Mt 7:21-27; Lu 6:46-49; Ro 2:13; Jas 1:22-25; Rev 1:3).

Now to Haggai's second message (CP Hag 2:1-9). In V1-5 here Haggai encourages the Jews to rebuild the temple by declaring the promise of God to be with them by His Holy Spirit. They need have no fear – the Holy Spirit would remain with them as He had with Moses and the elders when they led the Israelites out of Egypt in the Exodus, and throughout their sojourn in the wilderness (CP Hag 2:4-5; Nu 11:16-17; 25 and Isa 63:11 with Zech 4:6-9). The teaching in Hag 2:5 is essentially that the Holy Spirit is meant to interact with the spirit of the Jews to complete the work of building God's house. There are three significant points underlined here: the Holy Spirit is a vital part of God's covenant with His people; He is an abiding gift to them; and His presence removes fear from their situations. These principles remain the same for Christians today

(CP Jn 7:37-39; 14:16; Ac 2:38; 2Ti 1:7-9). The Holy Spirit is the motivational empowering of God in Christians today as He was in Haggai's time to do the work God requires of them (CP Ac 1:4-8; 2Cor 4:7-18). The treasure in earthen vessels in 2Cor 4:7 is the Holy Spirit. The promise of the Holy Spirit affirmed by the covenant God made with Israel in the Exodus is still being fulfilled in God's people today.

The next part of Haggai's second message in V6-9 in Hag 2 is a prophecy which is yet to be fulfilled. The first part of the prophecy in V6 "... *and I will shake the heavens and the earth*" foretells the future renovation of heaven and earth contemporaneous with the Great White Throne judgement at the end of Christ's millennial – one thousand years – reign on earth (CP Hag 2:6, 21 with Ro 8:19-23; He 1:10-12; 12:26-29; 2Pe 3:7, 10-13; Rev 20:11; 21:1). In V7 of Hag 2, Haggai foretells God's future judgement on the nations at Christ's second coming after the tribulation, prior to setting up His millennial kingdom, "... *and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come*" (CP Hag 2:7; with Mt 25:31-46). *All nations* who will be gathered together before Jesus in Mt 25:32 are the Gentiles who survive the tribulation. Their judgement takes place to determine who of them will go into the millennium. The basis of God's judgement on the Gentiles will be their failure to extend mercy to the Jewish believers during the tribulation. The sheep are the Jewish believers; the goats are Gentile unbelievers. *The desire of all nations* in Hag 2:7 is Jesus. This refers to Christ's Second Advent when all nations will be blessed by Him (CP Isa 2:1-4; Joel 3:18; Mic 4:1-5; Zech 14:8-9, 16, 20-21 with Mt 24:29-31; 2Th 1:4-10). The last part of V7 in Hag 2 "...*and I shall fill this house with glory saith the Lord of Hosts*" is foretelling the glory of the future temple in heaven – the Tabernacle of God – which Christ will build (CP Zech 6:12-13 with Rev 11:19; 15:5-8; 21:3). Not only will Jesus build the temple of God in heaven, He will also fill it with His glory and rule upon His throne as the Prince of Peace. The glory of this temple – *this latter house* – will far surpass Solomon's temple – *the former* (CP Hag 2:7-9; and Eze 43:1-7 with Isa 9:6-7; Hos 3:4-5; Amos 9:11-15; Lu 1:32-33; Ac 2:29-36).

Let us look now at Haggai's third message (CP Hag 2:10-19). We learn from Haggai's message here that a people defiled by disobedience, can be purified and blessed by obedience. While the Jews' disobedience caused God's blessings to be withheld, their obedience would cause His blessings to be released. In V10-14 Haggai demonstrated from the law that the Jews' sacrifices offered on the altar were unclean while they remained disobedient to God's word and neglected to rebuild His temple. Haggai reminded them that holiness is not transferable. It cannot be passed on, but the corrupting influence of sin can be. What it means is that work and worship do not make anything holy, but sin contaminates work and worship (CP V10-14 with 1Sam 15:22-23; Psal 51:16-17; Pr 21:23; Ecc 5:1; Isa 1:11-17; Jer 7:22-23, Hos 6:6; Mic 6:6-8). This teaching is for our admonition also. Sin and selfish attitudes taint everything. Even good deeds done for God count for

nothing if Christians are not walking in the way God has prescribed for them (CP Mt 5:23-24; Mk 12:28-34). V15-17 in Hag 2 describes the shortages the Jews had experienced and the poor harvests they reaped because of their disobedience. In V18-19 however, God promises to bless them because of their obedience. This principle is also expressed in the New Testament. God's favour comes to Christians only as they continue to seek Him and obey His commandments (CP V15-19 with Mt 6:24-34; Jn 14:21-23).

Haggai's fourth and final message from God to the Jews is in the last four verses in Hag 2 (CP Hag 2:20-23). Here Haggai prophesies events that will take place at the second advent of Christ. In V21 he foretells again the renovation of heaven and earth, which we examined in our study on V6. In V22 he foretells the overthrow of the thrones of kingdoms and the destruction of the power of the kingdoms. This prophecy will be fulfilled when Christ becomes Sovereign over all the kingdoms of the world at his second advent after defeating Antichrist and his armies at the Battle of Armageddon (CP Isa 63:1-6; Eze 38:1-23; 39:1-29; Zech 14:1-21; Lu 1:32-33 2Th 1:7-10; Jude 14-15; Rev 11:15, 19:11-21). At the Battle of Armageddon God will turn His enemies against each other and many will be slain by the sword of his brother (CP Hag 2:22 with Eze 38:21;

Zech 14:12-13). In Hag 2:23 God reveals to Zerubbabel that *in that day* –when the time came to shake the heavens and the earth, and to fulfill the prophecy of V22 – He would take Zerubbabel and make him like a signet ring, which is a seal or mark of supreme authority. This pointed to Zerubbabel being a forebear of the one who was to become the supreme authority over the whole universe – Jesus. God had chosen Zerubbabel to re-establish King David's lineage from which Messiah was to come, which had been broken by God's curse upon Jehoiakim and Jehoichin. This bypassed God's curse (CP Jer 22:24-30; 36:27-32). Zerubbabel was a forebear of Christ on both Joseph's side (CP Mt 1:12-13), and Mary's side (CP Lu 3:27).

The book of Haggai is a key lesson in faith for Christians today. The challenge to faith is the same in every generation. God's people must choose to believe and reckon as true that when they turn from self-serving pursuits and personal agendas to focus on doing the work of God's word to advance His kingdom, He will bless them above anything they can imagine (CP Ga 3:20). But, Christians must always remember that God has obligated Himself to save only those who persevere in faith doing the work of His word (CP Psa 119:9; Pr 4:4; Mt 7:21-27; 12:30; Lu 13:23-27; Ro 2:13; Jas 1:22-25; Rev 1:3; 3:14-22).