

¹⁰ On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Haggai: ¹¹ 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Ask the priests what the law says: ¹² if someone carries consecrated meat in the fold of their garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, olive oil or other food, does it become consecrated?"' The priests answered, 'No.' ¹³ Then Haggai said, 'If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled?' 'Yes,' the priests replied, 'it becomes defiled.' ¹⁴ Then Haggai said, "'So it is with this people and this nation in my sight," declares the Lord. "Whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled. ¹⁵ "Now give careful thought to this from this day on – consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the Lord's temple. ¹⁶ When anyone came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When anyone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were only twenty. ¹⁷ I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not return to me," declares the Lord. ¹⁸ "From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid. Give careful thought: ¹⁹ is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig-tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit. "From this day on I will bless you.'" ²⁰ The word of the Lord came to Haggai a second time on the twenty-fourth day of the month: ²¹ 'Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. ²² I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother. ²³ "On that day," declares the Lord Almighty, "I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel," declares the Lord, "and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you," declares the Lord Almighty.'

Last week it was October 520BC. Now it's two months later, December 520BC. Last week we saw how God was encouraging the people. He was with them, they were not to fear. Two months later He's back to challenge the people on purity and impurity coupled with holiness and unholiness. So far, the Temple only had its altar, needed by the priests to make the sacrifices ordained by God to enable sin to be forgiven. However, while the priesthood may have thought that the basics were alright, God expected more.

A couple of simple questions – (1) Does what has been made pure enable anything it touches to become pure? (2) Does anything that is impure make what was pure become impure? It's pretty simple – a clean thing in contact with a dirty thing will not cleanse the dirty things and will itself become dirty. A dirty thing in contact with clean things will make everything dirty. We saw in Zechariah 3 that the high priest Joshua was clothed in dirty rags, but when they were removed, he could be made clean, his sins forgiven and be given clean clothes. Dirt contaminates all that it is contact with. Anything pure is contaminated when in contact with dirt. A sick person cannot catch health from contacting a healthy person, but the healthy person can become sick by contacting a sick person. Normally, the principle of transmission only works one way.

¹⁴ Then Haggai said, "'So it is with this people and this nation in my sight," declares the Lord. "Whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled. This is pretty blunt but isn't it the same as when we admit that we're all sinners. We are all defiled by sin. God told the people that they were defiled by their neglect in getting on with the work of rebuilding the Temple. The returning Jews may have thought that once they were back on their ancestral lands and following the

commandments would somehow make them pure and holy. They built their own houses while neglecting God's house. Neglect contaminated everything else they were doing. Like much of Haggai one could take what God says as being full of rebukes, but that is to read into factual statements a negative connotation instead of a positive one. God speaks of the reality because He sees into people's hearts. There is no hiding from God. Having just the altar, while all around was still in decay and ruin, meant that the altar was contaminated and what they were doing was contaminated and caused the land to be contaminated. We often claim that we stand on holy ground – something only mentioned in relation to Moses in front of the burning bush – but does our holy ground moment make our surroundings holy? We live in a very unholy contaminated world and sadly contact with that world contaminates us. We stand on holy ground every time we resist temptation, every time we forgive, every time we obey God, every time we follow Christ, every time the Holy Spirit guides us, every time we love in the face of hatred. What is this holy ground? It is the Rock of Christ. It is the firm foundation of knowing our inseparable relationship with God. See the Old Testament always points to Christ!

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Things weren't going well in Judea and the reason behind that was neglect of the work needed on God's house. That will seem a bit odd to us as a church building is not necessarily a priority for a fellowship. Many thriving churches have no buildings and finding one to buy, convert or build from scratch is not their priority. But when God reveals a priority, then it needs to be the priority. God used the king of Persia to send people home from exile to build the Temple, and what did they do? They built their houses and re-occupied their ancestral lands, and instead of rebuilding the Temple, just built an altar. The priority was themselves first, and for nearly 70 years God has been patient waiting for them to get going with the work on His house. The land didn't crop well, but they didn't get the hint. Is there a parallel here? Have things got better in the last 70 years? Materially yes, spiritually no. How can we in this country expect God's blessings when He is neglected more and more? How can we expect God's blessings, when the land is becoming more and more contaminated with shameless sinfulness, selfishness and greed? When we turn back to God, He will bless us. When the people repent of their wicked ways, and humble themselves and pray, God will bless the nation.

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rise and fall, often in civil wars. The Persian empire fell in 330BC 200 years after Haggai's prophecy, with Alexander's conquest, and that empire divided itself and fell under the Romans in stages from 188BC to 64BC. Empires rise and fall but God remains the same. This was not an invitation for Zerubbabel to lead a revolt against King Darius. It was a promise that God is in control over the armies of foreign kingdoms who attack Israel. A promise that remains to this day.

There are a number of references in the Bible to shaking the heavens and the earth. Twice in the psalms – 68:8 *The earth quaked; the heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God; Sinai itself quaked at the presence of God, the God of Israel.* Psalm 104:32 *He looks at the earth, and it trembles; He touches the mountains, and they smoke.* Jeremiah 10:10 *But the Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure His indignation.* The presence of God causes the earth to shake, as in the time when Moses went up Mount Sinai. In Acts 4:31 the Holy Spirit can make the place where people are praying shake: *And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.* When God says He will shake the heavens and the earth He is speaking about His sovereign power.

In Hebrews there are several warnings about the holiness and awesomeness of God. Hebrews 12:25-27 says: *See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven."* It then goes on to explain why God **will shake heaven and earth**: (verse 27) *Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.* The kingdom of God cannot be shaken, while human kingdoms can be shaken. At Mount Sinai, covered in smoke with the ground trembling, trumpet blasts, the voice of God spoke the 10 commandments. The people did not want to hear the voice of God speaking to them. They couldn't bear hearing directly from God saying, *"do not have God speak to us or we will die"* (Exodus 20:19) and would rather have Moses tell them what God is saying and so they sent Moses up Mount Sinai to hear from God. The warning in Hebrews 12 is for us not to be like the Israelites when we hear God speaking to us. Hebrews 3:7-8 refers to hearing God's voice *"Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness."* It is really important to obey when God speaks.

Also, there will be a time when the heavens and the earth will be shaken – see Revelation 6:12 when the sixth seal is opened, and all will cry out (verse 16) *"hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb"* The Bible is full of cross referenced truths

and the Old Testament revelations point to the Lamb and how God wants us to be in communication with Him in the same way, ideally, that He was with Adam in the garden.

Moving on to the last verse: ²³ *“On that day,” declares the Lord Almighty, “I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,” declares the Lord, “and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,” declares the Lord Almighty.* The signet ring is a token of power, and Zerubbabel is of royal blood. He is the grandson of king Jeconiah (the last king of Judah) and a descendant of Solomon. He is mentioned in Matthew’s genealogy of Joseph. Zerubbabel could be recognised by the people as their legitimate ruler, even though he was not crowned a king because the Persians wouldn’t allow that. However, it is remarkably generous for the Persians not only to have sent back 50,000 exiles, but appointed someone who could claim to be their king as governor. God used the Persians – king Cyrus being praised by God (Isaiah 45) as “his anointed”, being wise in choosing Daniel as an adviser, being generous sending back exiles and giving them money to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:4).

What were the 6 points from last week? Are they the same this week?

Last week’s 6 points were:

- 1 God’s promises are true.
- 2 God’s promises once given are not taken away unless they were conditional.
- 3 God is merciful and forgiving.
- 4 God encourages and strengthens those who love Him.
- 5 God provides what is needed when it is needed.
- 6 God’s Word in the Old Testament points to Jesus on hundreds of occasions. Some say 150 times, others over 300. Here in Haggai, we can see with the benefit of hindsight that the coming Messiah is promised.

This week’s six points are:

- 1 God’s promises are true.
- 2 Sin contaminates everything.
- 3 Neglect spoils relationship with God and other people.
- 4 God is sovereign and in control of all things.
- 5 If we hear His voice, we should not harden our hearts, but respond in obedience.
- 6 God can use unbelieving rulers to do His will.