

Littlebourne Sunday 18th May 2025 – Haggai 2:1-9 - PH

¹ On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: ² ‘Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, ³ “Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?” ⁴ But now be strong, Zerubbabel,” declares the Lord. “Be strong, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,” declares the Lord, “and work. For I am with you,” declares the Lord Almighty. ⁵ “This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.”

⁶ ‘This is what the Lord Almighty says: “In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. ⁷ I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,” says the Lord Almighty. ⁸ “The silver is mine and the gold is mine,” declares the Lord Almighty. ⁹ “The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,” says the Lord Almighty. “And in this place I will grant peace,” declares the Lord Almighty.’

Last week it was August 520BC, now it's October 520BC. Israel is under Persian occupation and it's 66 years since the Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. In Ezra chapter 3, when 50,000 returned to Jerusalem and Judea it was 536BC and 50 years after the fall of Jerusalem. The old men wept when they saw the ruins. Solomon's temple was a sight that invited awe and wonder. Inside there was gold everywhere, and it was huge. But it was reduced to rubble. 656 years later the second temple would be reduced to rubble in AD70 by the Romans. It too was a fine building that dominated Jerusalem.

The Lord asks, “who is left who saw the temple in its former glory?” They would have to be old men in their 80s and older as boys wouldn't be let in until they were over age 12. The Lord asks rhetorical questions – “how does it look now?” and “doesn't it seem like nothing?” He knows the answer. They had put in the foundations only so far and as we saw last week fixed for themselves nice houses to live in. The plans were not going to be as ostentatious as the old temple, and it was going to be a downsized version. Naturally the old would see the rebuilding on a lesser scale as disappointing. The Lord asks these questions and understands their disappointment, so while it seems like a stinging rebuke, is it that really? The work had been going slowly and perhaps the people might not be giving God a lot of attention, despite the purpose for which Persian king sent them back to Jerusalem was to rebuild the Temple. It was to take four years to rebuild the Temple and that would be just the inner building. It won't have been as grand as Solomon's temple, but it was the house of the Lord none the less. The outer courts would have to wait another 500 years for king Herod the Great to rebuild the whole complex back to what it would have

looked like in the days of king Solomon. The Jews needed motivation. What is clear is the people responded to the Word of the Lord proclaimed by the prophet Haggai and supported by the governor Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua.

⁴ But now be strong, Zerubbabel,” declares the Lord. “Be strong, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,” declares the Lord, “and work. For I am with you,” declares the Lord Almighty. Despite the criticism, God says “work; for I am with you”. If we hear that God is with us in our work, we have assurance that it will accomplish what God wanted. Here He wants the temple rebuilt. As we are children under the new covenant, and the church is the people not the building, why would this temple be so important for God to make it a priority for the Jews? In the next 500 years the Jews preserved their identity and closeness to God through the festivals requiring every man to go to Jerusalem to celebrate in order to remember all God has done for the Israelites. The Law of Moses stipulated that obedience of the Law resulted in blessings. All the Jews who returned to Judea knew why they had been taken into captivity and why the temple had been destroyed – simply because of disobedience.

While the Christian life is not always going to be free from difficulties, it will be full of blessings if we follow Jesus obediently. The messed-up lives of people who have rejected God witness what happens when people choose their own ways instead of God’s ways. With hindsight we can see in the next 500 years that the Jews who followed the Law of Moses succeeded, despite difficulties, to preserve their way of life in Israel while many around them suffered far worse oppression from those who conquered them.

God encourages the Jews by saying: ⁵ *“This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.”*

Fear of getting things wrong, fear of offending others, fear of making oneself look foolish. These are all fears common to mankind, but if God is with us, what can man do? The saying that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” might imply that we should be frightened of God, but it means that being in awe of God and all He has made, done and revealed, will result in making wise choices in our behaviour towards God and our fellow man. God was with the returning Jews, just as Jesus says He is with us always. When we have this assurance of the presence of Holy Spirit, what do we have to fear? In the Old Testament the Spirit of God was with the people when they were obedient. In the New Testament the Spirit of God is inside each disciple.

⁶ ‘This is what the Lord Almighty says: “In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. ⁷ I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,” says the Lord Almighty. ⁸ “The silver is mine and the gold is mine,” declares the Lord Almighty. ⁹ “The glory of this present house

will be greater than the glory of the former house,” says the Lord Almighty. “And in this place I will grant peace,” declares the Lord Almighty.’

The revelation to Haggai is further encouragement. It is a prophecy about the coming Messiah, who was in the temple and taught the people. While the glory of God filled the Temple of Solomon on its dedication, God Himself physically went into the Temple in the person of Jesus. As he taught, none could refute what he was saying, for he taught the people the Truth. At another level, all the nations one day will come to Jerusalem and there will be a new Jerusalem and a new earth with Jesus in charge. The glory will be greater than anything ever seen before.

God assures the Jews that silver and gold are not a problem for them as he will provide. We are to be generous to those in genuine need and should not worry about money. In four years, the inner Temple was rebuilt with the resources the people had from the land. We don’t know whether all the gold and silver that was there in the days of Solomon was able to be replaced, but enough was available to provide what was needed in accordance with the stipulations for the Tabernacle in Exodus 35-38. The other thing we do know is that the ark of the covenant, with the two tablets of the Law and Aaron’s rod inside, and the Mercy Seat (the gold lid on the ark) were lost after the sack of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. So, the Holy of Holies, the room into which the high priest went once a year to atone for the sins of Israel was an empty room. The Lord said: *“The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house.”* We have to interpret this as meaning that Jesus when He comes will be greater than the glory of the old Temple.

The Hebrew word “glory” is **kavod**, which comes from the root word meaning weight, heaviness... and so means honour, importance, respect, distinction, worthy of praise. We may have a different notion of glory – expecting it to mean a wonderful sight, with angels radiating light while singing “glory to God in the highest” as when the shepherds were told about the birth of Jesus. In Exodus 40:34-35 *“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”* Similarly, the glory of the Lord came when Solomon dedicated the Temple 2 Chronicles 7:1 *As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire descended from heaven and burned up the burnt offerings and sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the Temple. ² The priests could not enter into the Temple because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord’s Temple. ³ When all of the Israelis saw the fire coming down and the glory of the Lord resting on the Temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement, worshipped, and gave thanks to the Lord.* The heavy presence of God would not allow anyone into the Temple. But when Jesus was in the Temple, he was accessible to all. The priests, the teachers of the Law and Pharisees avoided him after realising that they couldn’t trap him with their trick

questions. Today people are searching for Truth. Many will find the Truth found in Jesus. But many others avoid the Truth when it conflicts with their own desires, and will choose to hold on to what they want to carry on doing rather than turning away from wrong doing. “Repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins” is the Pentecost message from Peter, but for many repentance is too hard as it involves a change of lifestyle. Holy Spirit convicts and makes repentance so much easier, because He changes the desires of our heart. In the New Covenant we have Jesus and Holy Spirit communicating with all who seek God, and no longer is a Levitical priesthood needed to intercede for the sins of the people. We are all a royal priesthood of believers able to have direct contact with God. That is more glorious than any short-term physical phenomenon of the glory of God coming down from heaven to fill a room, which of course is wonderful and would result in changed lives.

Finally the Lord says *“And in this place I will grant peace,”* For a while there was peace under Persian rule, then peace under Greek rule, then the Maccabean war of independence, then peace under the Herodian kings and Romans, until the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 and the scattering of the Jews again outside Israel. Today there is peace again in Jerusalem. When the heavenly city is built as revealed in the Revelation of John, there will be real peace again and the glory of the Lord will shine around.

So, what can we take from this passage?

- 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.