

IX. *Who's Who*

29-Jan-06 Haggai 1:1-2

Theme: God sends Haggai the prophet to His people to stir them up to build for God's glory.

Key Verses: ¹In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, ²“Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: ‘This people says, “The time has not come, the time that the LORD’s house should be built.”’”

Review

Last week we finished our study of the book of Micah by looking at Micah chapter 7. Towards the end of the chapter, Micah asks the rhetorical question **Who is a God like you?** (v. 18a), which serves as the theme of the passage. Of course, the answer to the question is obvious: no one is comparable to our *great God*.

Throughout this chapter, Micah gives us concrete examples of God's greatness. In the first section (vv. 1-7), the *prophet's profession* is in a God who administers justice mingled with mercy. Because of their sin, the people of God deserve justice, and yet Micah clings to God for His salvation.

The second section of the chapter is Micah's *salvation song* that demonstrates that mercy of God toward His people, yet mingled with justice for the unbelieving nations. In four stanzas, Micah demonstrates God's greatness in a variety of ways. Our God is a *great God* because He restores His fallen people. Our God is a *great God* because He blesses and protects His people. Our God is a *great God* because He cares for and shepherds His people. And our God is a *great God* because He forgives the sins of His people forever.

Of all these acts, the forgiveness of God is the most unexpected and amazing to Micah. God's mercy in restoring, blessing, shepherding, and forgiving His people when they don't deserve it demonstrates His unsurpassed greatness.

Introduction

Today we shift gears and shift centuries as we begin our four-week study of the prophecy of Haggai. Listen to the introduction to Haggai's prophecy:

¹In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, ²“Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: ‘This people says, “The time has not come, the time that the LORD’s house should be built”’” (Hag. 1:1-2).

This introduction is a veritable *who's who* list. In order to understand the background and context of Haggai's prophecy, we need to be introduced to the characters in these two verses. And in order to help us with those introductions, we will be reviewing a significant portion of the book of Ezra which provides the historical backdrop for the book of Haggai. We will also take a look at a bit of the book of Zechariah as well. So today, I'd like to introduce you to: 1) a

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powerful Persian; 2) a *purified priest*; 3) a *godly governor*; 4) a remnant of *procrastinating people*; 5) a *practical prophet*; and last but not least 6) reintroduce you to our *great God*.

Exposition

A. Powerful Persian (1:1; Ezra 1)

The first person we encounter in the book of Haggai is a *powerful Persian*: **King Darius**. To understand who King Darius was, we have to review some Jewish history. As you recall, the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrian empire in 722 BC. Many of the citizens of Israel were deported throughout the near East. Other peoples were brought in to repopulate Samaria. In time, these new people intermingled with the remaining Jews and became the Samaritans.

Meanwhile, the southern kingdom of Judah ruled by the line of David survived the Assyrian threat of Sennacherib in 701 BC. In the 6th Century BC, the power of Assyria waned, as the power of the Babylonians grew. The city of Nineveh fell to the Medes and Babylonians in 612 BC. By 605 BC, Assyria was part of the Babylonian empire under the young Nebuchadnezzar. About the same time (609 BC), the last righteous king of Judah, King Josiah, died in battle. After his death, it was a swift descent into oblivion for the southern kingdom. Judah suffered a series of deportations to Babylon. Finally, in 586 BC Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple and completed the deportation of Jewish citizens to Babylon. The seventy years of exile predicted by the prophet Jeremiah was well and truly underway.

⁸Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Because you have not heard My words, ⁹behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,’ says the LORD, ‘and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations. ... ¹¹And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall *serve the king of Babylon seventy years*’ (Jer. 25:8-9, 11).

Just a note on the seventy years of captivity. Seventy is not only a product of two symbolic numbers (7 – perfection of quality; 10 – perfection of quantity), but it is also a literal number. The first deportation of Jerusalem to Babylon (including Daniel) occurred in 605 BC. The second deportation (including Ezekiel) occurred in 597 BC. The third deportation occurred after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 BC. The first return to Jerusalem occurred in 538 BC. The work on the Temple began and stopped in 536 BC. The construction of the Temple was restarted in 520 BC and completed in 516 BC. From first deportation to the beginning of reconstruction of the Temple was 70 years (605 to 536 BC). From the destruction of the Temple to completion of the Temple was also 70 years (586 to 516 BC).

The power of Babylon did not last long. Under the leadership of Cyrus, the Medes and Persians destroyed the city of Babylon in October, 539 BC and took over their empire, again as Jeremiah said:

¹²‘Then it will come to pass, *when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,*’ says the LORD; ‘and I will make it a perpetual desolation’ (Jer. 25:12).

King Cyrus of Persia was raised up by God for two purposes: 1) to punish the Babylonians per Jeremiah; and 2) to restore the remnant of Israel back in Jerusalem, as Isaiah had prophesied:

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²⁸[I am the LORD] who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, “You shall be built,” and to the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid”’ (Is. 44:28).

In 538 BC, King Cyrus issued a proclamation, allowing the Jews to return to their homeland. This proclamation is described in Ezra chapter 1. The purpose of the return was to rebuild the Temple of God. Cyrus provided gold and silver articles out of the treasury of Nebuchadnezzar which had been taken from the original Temple. The people of God also received articles of silver, gold, and precious articles to use in the Temple reconstruction. The Babylonian captivity was over; the Restoration period had begun!

Cyrus was killed in battle in 530 BC. His son and successor Cambyses, a very different sort of man, was a tyrant who feared assassination. Hearing of a plot to usurp the throne, Cambyses evidently killed himself in 522 BC, leaving a power vacuum which was soon filled by Darius, the son of the governor of Susa and an officer of Cambyses. This is the King Darius of Haggai 1:1. Darius reigned 37 years and brought back stability to the Persian empire. It was in the second year of King Darius, 520 BC that the events recorded in the book of Haggai occur. This is King Darius, our *powerful Persian*.

B. Purified Priest (1:1; Ezra 2; Zech. 3:1-10)

Next, I would like to introduce you to a *purified priest*: **Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest**. Joshua (as he is known in Haggai and Zechariah), or Jeshua (as he is called in Ezra 2:2ff) was a descendent of Zadok the high priest of David’s time. His father, Jehozadak (Jozadak – Ezra 3:2, 8) went into captivity when Jerusalem was destroyed (1 Chr. 6:12-15). His name means “Yah[weh] is Salvation” and is equivalent to the name of our Savior, Jesus.

Joshua is listed as the first returnee in the list of those who returned from exile after the governor Zerubbabel:

¹Now these are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his own city.

²Those who came with Zerubbabel were *Jeshua* ... (Ezra 2:1-2a).

The rest of Ezra chapter 2 is a long list of returnees. Emphasis is placed in this list on the functions of worship. There were priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Temple servants, and Solomon’s servants. All of these groups were associated with the worship of God. Jordan points out that Ezra 1-2 follows the Exodus pattern of Scripture:

Theologically, this captivity corresponds to the bondage in Egypt. ... You have a sequence of events: bondage in Egypt; deliverance with great spoil; construction of God’s house with the spoils when God’s Spirit stirs the people up. The way Ezra is written is to call attention to this pattern. For example, in Ezra 1:6 there is an outpouring from the Babylonians of spoil to build the Temple, just as the Egyptians (in fear) had given gold and spoil to the Israelites. God’s people get gold and supplies from the pagan nations to build God’s house. ... In Ezra 2, God includes a long list of names to honor those who were willing to return and become part of the remnant. Those who are faithful to God and follow him and build His house have their names recorded in His book. The people are categorized pre-eminently concerning their role with respect to the Temple of God.

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As high priest, Joshua was the spiritual leader of the remnant community. He was responsible for the worship of God. In Zechariah 3:1-5, we have an interesting vision of Joshua, the high priest, being purified by God. Symbolically, he represents the people of God before the Lord, clothed in filthy garments. But our gracious God transforms his dirty rags into rich robes, signifying that the guilt and reproach of sin has been removed. Zechariah goes on in 3:6-10 to make wonderful promises of the Messiah to come, but that is a study for another day. The point is that Joshua (and the remnant he represents) is a *priest purified* by God.

C. Godly Governor (1:1; Ezra 3-4; Zech. 4:6-9)

Let me now introduce you to our *godly governor*: **Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah**. In 1 Chronicles 3:19 we are given the genealogy of David. The last legitimate king of Judah was Jehoiachin, or Jeconiah as he is referred to in 1 Chronicles. Jeconiah went into captivity into Babylon during the second deportation in 597 BC. He was replaced on the throne by his uncle Zedekiah, but the Scripture reckons the true line to pass through Jeconiah. According to 1 Chronicles 3:19, Zerubbabel was the son of Jeconiah's third son, Pedaiiah, instead of his first son, Shealtiel. Baldwin explains the difficulty: "*Shealtiel*, the eldest, appears to have been childless. Shealtiel most probably adopted his eldest nephew, who from then on would be called by his name; another possibility is that he was born to Shealtiel's widow by levirate marriage." Zerubbabel's name appears in the New Testament genealogies of Jesus Christ (*cp.* Mt. 1:12-13; Lk. 3:27).

Zerubbabel is also called Sheshbazzar in Ezra 1:8 and 5:14. Evidently, Sheshbazzar was his Babylonian name and Zerubbabel was his Hebrew name. The two names are used interchangeably in the book of Ezra. Zerubbabel's name means "born in Babylon," a reminder that God's grace in carrying forward the Davidic line continued even through the chastisement of the Babylonian captivity. He is called a "prince of Judah" in Ezra 1:8.

Zerubbabel was a righteous man and a good leader of his people. Although heir to the throne of David, he was content with being a governor of a small province in the Persian Empire. The Scripture portrays Zerubbabel as a faithful man and *godly governor*. Consider this exhortation and promise given to him by the prophet Zechariah:

⁶So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts. ⁷'Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"'" ⁸Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying: ⁹"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands shall also finish it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you (Zech. 4:6-9).

Zerubbabel led the remnant of God's people back from Babylon to Jerusalem after the decree of Cyrus. The first order of business after getting everyone resettled into their homes (*cp.* Ezra 2:70), was to restore the worship of God in Jerusalem. Ezra chapter 3 records the efforts of Zerubbabel.

The first order of business was rebuilding the altar of sacrifice amid the ruins of the Temple (Ezra 3:1-6). This work was started in 537 BC in the seventh month, the holiest month of the Jewish calendar (Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles). Zerubbabel and Joshua were very careful to follow the "Law of Moses the man of God" (Ezra 3:2). They reinstated the morning and evening sacrifices, the Feast of Tabernacles, the new moon feasts, and all of the other

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sacrifices and services appointed in the Law. They also began preparations for rebuilding the Temple, hiring skilled workers and purchasing construction materials.

Early the next year (536 BC), work began on the Temple itself (Ezra 3:8-13). Once again, Zerubbabel and Joshua, the civil and religious leaders of the people, join together in this work of building God house. When the foundation of the Temple is laid, the people of God celebrate using Psalm 136 as their response. However, amidst the joy of seeing the work on the Temple begin, there is also much sadness, as the oldest members of the remnant weep, realizing that the glory of this second temple will not approach the glory of Solomon's Temple.

So far, so good. But then resistance to the work of God's people arises. This is described in Ezra chapter 4. Samaritans come to Zerubbabel and Joshua and ask to be included in the building project. But Zerubbabel refuses! Why? Because he is not willing to compromise the purity of God's people with these outsiders. They were syncretistic; that means they had a mixed up religious practice, borrowing bits from various pagan religions. Zerubbabel rightly feared (looking back upon the history of Israel), that allowing syncretism into the purity of God's worship would be disastrous for the spiritual health of God's people.

Because they are not permitted to infiltrate the work, these unclean outsiders begin to frustrate it. Ezra tells us that "the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia" (Ezra 4:4b-5). By their actions they demonstrated that they were unworthy of the work. Ultimately, these enemies of God were successful. They were able to frustrate the work and bring it to a halt.

²⁴Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia (Ezra 4:24).

D. Procrastinating People (1:2)

Thus, for sixteen years, (536-520 BC), the work of rebuilding the Temple was halted. The faithful remnant that returned to Jerusalem at the first opportunity has been transformed into a *procrastinating people*. Listen to God's indictment: **"This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built""** (v. 2b).

What happened? God's people are no longer "My people;" they are "this people." There is an implied rebuke in that address. God's people had started out well, but they had failed to persevere. They had allowed the opposition of the world to interfere and defeat their witness. How could this be?

James Boice points out that despite the charge raised against "this people" in the book of Haggai, the remnant in Jerusalem were very different than their predecessors:

These people were not at all like those who had lived in Israel and Judah previously. True, they were neglecting to build the Temple and this was serious in God's sight. It was an indication that their spiritual priorities were not right. They were living for themselves rather than for God's glory. But they were still the right people, living in the right place, wanting to do the right work for the right reasons.

Let's briefly consider Boice's points:

First, in Haggai we are dealing with the *right people*, select people whose devotion to and zeal for God were evident. This is summed up in the spiritual meaning of the word

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‘remnant.’ The ‘remnant’ to whom the message was given was composed of Israelites who were distinguished by special devotion to the Lord. It was their devotion to him, and their zeal for His house, that was the cause of their separation from the mass of their brethren who remained behind in Babylon. They were, therefore, a choice company of people.

Second, the people to whom God directs His word through Haggai were in the *right place*. That is, they were in Jerusalem and its environs at the call of God and not in Babylon among those who had preferred their fixed way of life to the rigors of a return. In the Old Testament period God had placed a special value on Jerusalem and had required that the sacrifices for sin be made there and not elsewhere. The people who had returned with Zerubbabel and Joshua wanted to be in the place of God’s blessing. When the call to return came, they left Babylon and got back to Jerusalem as soon as possible.

Third, the remnant to whom Haggai spoke also wanted to be about the *right work*. There were many things they needed to do. They needed to provide homes for their families. They needed to make a living, in their case largely through farming. They needed to establish schools, shops, commerce, trade. These were all valid and necessary pursuits. But in addition to these and chief among them, the people also wanted to rebuild the temple, which is what God had put into the heart of Cyrus to decree (*cf.* Ezra 1:2ff.). These people clearly wanted to serve God and put His work above their own interests.

Finally, the people were working for the *right reasons*. So far as we are told, their sole desire was to please God. They were characterized by affection and zeal for God’s house, and this is a great thing in His sight.

The people of Haggai’s day were the remnant, the Old Testament Church. They had been called to a work, to rebuild God’s Temple for His glory. They had started out on that mission enthusiastically. They had real zeal to see God’s kingdom built up and expanded. But along the way, opposition came. The work became harder. Success seemed more difficult. It was taking too long, and the cost was high. They got tired and discouraged. Things weren’t going well. Other responsibilities crept in: family, home, work – all legitimate, but all crowding out their highest calling. They became too busy with other things.

And so slowly but surely, the work ground to a halt. Oh, if you asked anyone in Jerusalem, they probably would have replied that they fully intended for the work to continue. It just wasn’t the right moment. They were waiting for the right circumstance to pick up the effort again. “Meanwhile, they became fat and comfortable and middle-aged, while old ideals died” (Bentley).

Does that sound familiar? Does that description of the remnant hit home? The book of Haggai speaks to people who are a lot like you and me. Those people had good intentions, but the work of building God’s kingdom did not seem to get done. What about yourself? Do you find yourself looking to others to do God’s work? Are other responsibilities choking out your duty and service to your Lord? Are you “fat and comfortable and middle-aged,” letting someone else do what you should be doing? Bentley writes: “We have been placed in our situations by the Lord, not necessarily to erect a building made with hands but to build a church for God’s glory. Yet we are reluctant to get on with the work.” Have you become a *procrastinating people* as well? Then the book of Haggai is written for you.

E. Practical Prophet (1:1-2; Ezra 5-6)

That brings us up to the “present,” up to the point where the book of Haggai begins in the second year of the reign of Darius (520 BC). The people of God have stalled out for sixteen years in the Temple rebuilding project. Then God intervenes by sending two prophets to stir up the *procrastinating people*, the *godly governor*, and the *purified priest*:

¹Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. ²So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them (Ezra 5:1-2).

Notice how God sends both Haggai and Zechariah to assist Zerubbabel and Joshua in the work of rebuilding the Temple. Haggai was sent first, and then Zechariah was sent a few months later. Bentley points out that once **Haggai the prophet** joins Zerubbabel and Joshua, things start to happen. Interestingly, in these three individuals we have the confluence of the three Old Testament offices: Prophet, Priest, and King (governor). Is this a preview for us of the work and ministry of Jesus Christ, our greater Prophet, Priest, and King?

The book of Haggai is unusual in that it precisely dates all four of its messages (1:1; 2:1; 2:10; 2:20) plus the response of the people to Haggai’s message (1:15). Haggai’s four messages are given during a period of four months in the second half of 520 BC. Haggai’s ministry began about two months before the ministry of Zechariah started (*cp.* 1:1; Zech. 1:1).

Haggai is truly a *practical prophet*; his consistent message is to exhort the people of God to build for God’s glory, to finish what they had started. When Haggai comes on the scene, the Temple project restarts and proceeds rapidly. Within four years, the project which had stalled for sixteen years was completed. “Once Temple building began in earnest he had fulfilled his mission, and, having in Zechariah a successor to continue the work, he withdrew from the scene” (Baldwin).

We don’t know very much about the man Haggai. Unlike his colleague Zechariah, we don’t even know his father’s name. Some traditions believe Haggai was a young man born in Babylon; others believe he was an old man who had witnessed the glory of Solomon’s Temple in his youth before its destruction sixty-six years previously. I favor this latter viewpoint. I believe it is consistent with the focus of his message and the brevity of his ministry. In addition, the question he asks in 2:3 – **Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory?** – may indicate that he is including himself as one of those who could compare the difference in glory between the former and latter temples.

Haggai’s name means “my feast,” derived from the Hebrew word *hag* for “feast” or “festival.” There are several other names in the Old Testament derived from this same root: Haggi (Gen. 46:16); Haggith (2 Sam. 3:4), and Haggiah (1 Chr. 6:30). Haggai might have been born on a feast day and thus given this name.

Regardless of its origin, Haggai’s name is connected with his message. Interestingly, all of the dated messages in Haggai correspond directly or indirectly with religious feasts and festivals of Israel. The dates Haggai mentions are significant, but we often miss that fact because we are not familiar with the Hebrew calendar. In modern parlance, the dates Haggai gives would stand out to the Jewish reader like July 4, December 25, or September 11 would to us today.

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The first message was given **in the second year ... in the sixth month, on the first day of the month**. This day corresponds to around the beginning of September. The first day of the month in the Jewish calendar was a holy day, comparable to a Sabbath day (see Num. 28:11-15).

³Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon, at the full moon, on our solemn feast day (Ps. 81:3).

Because the first day of the month was treated as a Sabbath day, the remnant would have stopped working in order to gather for the worship of God. Thus, worship is the context for Haggai's first message to the remnant. They have gathered to worship God, but God is displeased with them because they are not worshipping Him as He has commanded. They have failed to build the Temple as they should. So, God sends Haggai to preach to them a message of exhortation and encouragement to finish the work they have started.

The second message is dated the twenty-first day of the seventh month (2:1), in mid-October. This date is tied to the end of the Feast of Tabernacles. As we will see, this date and this festival have special significance for the message of Haggai. The third and fourth messages are dated the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. This date is in late December. This date would eventually become associated with the Jewish Feast of Lights (or Hanukah). Jordan points out: "All of these feasts had to do with the building of the Temple. This last feast would come over into Christianity as Christmas or the Feast of the Incarnation, when the true Temple of God was born into the world."

Haggai does not come to remove opposition to the building project. That continued in the form of another Persian governor Tattenai (Ezra 5:3ff). The rest of Ezra chapter 5 and half of Ezra chapter 6 describe letters that go back and forth in an effort to stop the building process. Ultimately, King Darius, our *powerful Persian* friend, issues the decree that the building should go forward. And the last part of Ezra chapter 6 describes the completion and dedication of the Temple four years later, in the year 516 BC. Thus, Haggai's message bears fruit. Like Micah, Haggai was a prophet who saw success.

Haggai does not remove all opposition. Instead, what he does is re-orient the spiritual compass of God's people. Worldly opposition will continue. But God's people are called to God's work. Like the remnant 2500 years ago, we are also called by God to build His kingdom for His glory. We need to be about the work of the kingdom despite the opposition of the world. Let us heed the message of this very *practical prophet*.

F. Great God (1:1-2)

The final introduction this morning is to our *great God*. There are two main emphases in the text that we need to explore. First is His name: **the LORD of hosts**. This name of God is a particular favorite of the post-exilic prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Haggai uses the term 14 times (average 7 times per chapter), while Zechariah uses it 53 times (about 4x/ch) and Malachi uses it 24 times (6x/ch). Given the frequency of its use, we need to understand the significance of the term.

"LORD of hosts" is never used in the Pentateuch. The name first appears in 1 Samuel:

³This man [Elkanah] went up from his city yearly to worship and sacrifice to *the LORD of hosts* in Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:3a).

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¹¹Then she [Hannah] made a vow and said, “*O LORD of hosts*, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head” (1 Sam. 1:11).

⁴So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of *the LORD of hosts*, who dwells between the cherubim (1 Sam. 4:4a).

The first references to the name “LORD of hosts” appear in the context of worship, both of Elkanah and his wife Hannah. This imagery of worship is reinforced in the description of the Ark of the Covenant as belonging to the LORD of hosts. Notice where the LORD of hosts dwells: “between the cherubim” or the two figures of angelic beings on the top cover of the Ark. Jordan comments:

Genesis 2:1 – “Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, was finished.” The “hosts” are the angelic hosts, the hosts of people, and the armies of living creatures that God has created and are arranged around the throne of God and which serve His purposes. The two cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant represent the angelic hosts (armies) of God, whether organized in worship or battle. God is enthroned above the angelic hosts as they worship and glorify Him. So the reference is to worship and to military might and protection. This picture of God’s armies is emphasized throughout the books of Samuel and Kings (*e.g.*, 2 Ki. 6:17; 7:6; 2 Sam. 5:24). You don’t have to worry about armies of Syrians or Philistines, because God has His invisible army of angels to protect you. That’s the meaning of the title “Lord of Hosts.”

When you are a small, poor nation, it is important to use the title “Lord of Hosts,” especially when you are surrounded by strong, powerful nations like Persia. God uses the expression “Lord of Hosts,” Lord of armies, to assure His people of His protection. Secondly, it reminds them of their responsibility to rebuild the Temple, because the hosts of the Lord are organized around the throne of God (the book of Revelation shows the pattern of divine worship around the throne of God, especially in Rev. 4-5). Third, the hosts are going to conquer the world. This is made plain in Haggai and also in Zechariah 6:1-8. The book of Haggai ends with a statement that God will conquer the world. So, all of these thoughts are being set up by the use of the name “Lord of Hosts.”

The other emphasis we have regarding God in the opening verses of Haggai is His concern for **the LORD’s house**. The book of Haggai is all about building up “the LORD’s house.” It is about building for God’s glory. We know that Haggai was successful and the Temple was rebuilt, although not nearly as glorious as Solomon’s original Temple. It was later enlarged by King Herod and made even more glorious than the first Temple before it was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.

So where is the temple now? The Bible tells us that Jesus is the Temple of God (John 2: 19-21). Then we read that the called-out people of God (the church) are now the temple of God (2 Corinthians 6:16). The new temple is the body of Christ. The Christian community is now the temple of God, with Christ himself as the chosen and precious cornerstone (1 Peter 2:4-6). Each member of the church (*i.e.* the body of Christ) is, by virtue of being part of Christ’s body, a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Therefore all Christian believers have a solemn responsibility to live God-honoring lives

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because they, like the temple at Jerusalem in the time of Haggai, are the dwelling-place of the Lord Almighty (Bentley).

Conclusion

Let's review *who's who* in the book of Haggai. First there was the *powerful Persian*, Darius, who continued the work of Cyrus in allowing God's people to build the Temple of God. In His sovereignty, at exactly the right moments in time, God turned the hearts of Cyrus and Darius to look kindly upon His people.

Next, we met the religious and civil leaders of God's people: Joshua, the *purified priest*, and Zerubbabel, the *godly governor*. Once again, we can see God's sovereign grace in putting these men in charge of God's people at this crucial point in history. The prophet Micah reminded the people of his day how God had provided wise leaders during the Exodus (Micah 6:4). Once again, we have righteous leaders leading God's people out of captivity and returning with spoils to the Promised Land.

Perhaps you can identify with the *procrastinating people* of Jerusalem. As James Boice points out, they were "the right people, living in the right place, trying to do the right work for the right reasons." And yet, they had fallen into the trap that so many of us fall into. Time, age, changing priorities, other commitments, opposition, discouragement, difficulties, etc. had gotten in the way of building for God's glory.

That's why God sent Haggai, the *practical prophet* to encourage the remnant. They needed his exhortation to restart the work they had begun. Praise God that He always completes His work:

⁶... being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6).

Finally, we were reintroduced to our *great God*, the "LORD of hosts." That name of God is an appropriate reminder of His victory over all opposition in the world. This name also reminds us that our primary duty, our chief and highest end, is to glorify God through worship. The hosts of heaven gather around God in worship. We must do the same.

Haggai is a very practical book, exhorting us to be about the business of building God's Temple, His kingdom, His Church. Like the remnant of Haggai's day, we are called to build for God's glory.

Next week: Lesson 10 – Haggai's Housework – Haggai 1:2-15

Close in Prayer.