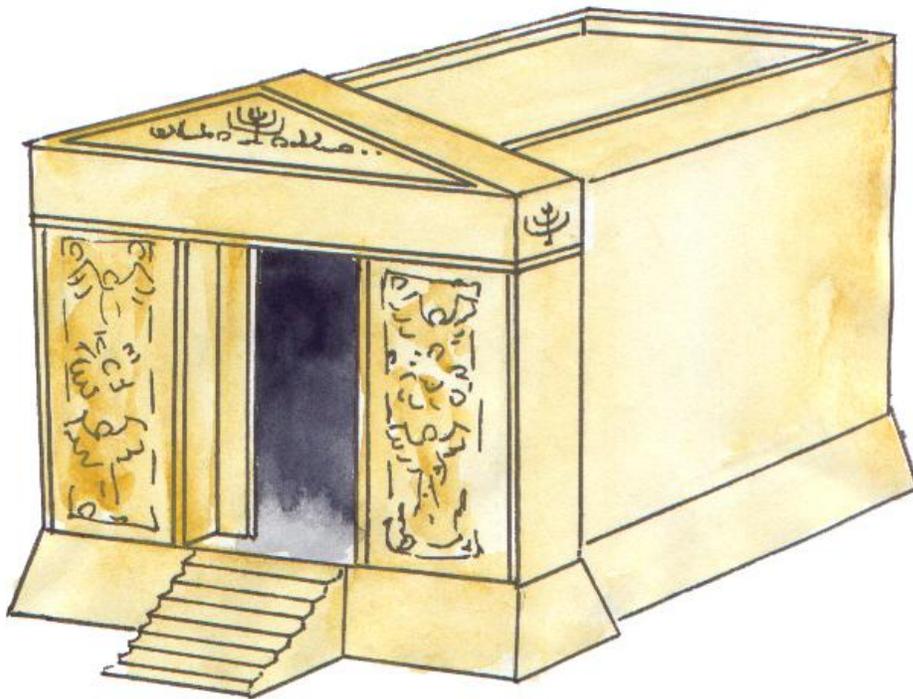


MAJORING ON THE MINORS: HAGGAI



*A series of sermons by
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Contents

- 1. Build God's House - 3***
- 2. The Best Is Yet To Be - 12***
- 3. Bringing God's Blessing Down - 21***
- 4. His Day Will Come - 29***

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Majoring On The Minors: Haggai - Chapter 1

"Build God's House"

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Haggai 1:1-15

Date: Sixth month, first day (29th August 520BC)

1. *The Rebuke For Procrastination (verses 2-4)*
2. *The Reaping Of Poverty (verses 5-6)*
3. *The Reason For Poverty (verses 9-11)*
4. *The Remedy For Poverty (verses 5,7,8)*
5. *The Renewal Of Purpose (verses 12-15)*

Turn with me to the book of Haggai, the book of Haggai and chapter 1. Haggai chapter 1 and let's read together the whole of this chapter, and if you have a pen and a bit of paper (you've been given a bit of paper, so you've no excuse -- you just need a pen now) take as many notes as you can. Because this little book, just like the book of Habakkuk, is packed full of information and it has amazed me as I have studied these books, and I hope it has amazed you, the relevancy of the minor prophets to our world today -- not just prophetically, but in everyday life, how relevant they really are. Haggai chapter 1, verse 1:

"In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built. Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord. Ye looked for much, and, lo it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands. Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord. Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord. And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, in the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king."

Now bear with me at the beginning of our message this evening, because there's a lot of things that we need to fill in to understand the little book of Haggai. Some historical facts, some biographical facts about this man Haggai, some things to do with the date of when he prophesied. So listen to me, just for a moment, and it will pay off, I hope, that when we look at what the prophet is saying, we will understand it because of the background of what he is prophesying to.

Haggai is the tenth of the twelve minor prophets. He is a post-exilic prophet. If you look on the back of your hand-out, you see outlined there the pre-exilic, the exilic and the post-exilic prophets. Exilic was when the people, the children of Judah, were in exile in Babylon. Pre-exilic was before they were in exile, before they were taken away, remember Habakkuk -- he was a pre-exilic prophet. But this little prophet of Haggai is post-exilic, in other words, it's when these children of Judah have come out of the land of Babylon, out of their captivity, they're now free, they're now back in the city of Jerusalem in their own land -- and now Haggai is coming to them and prophesying, giving them a message. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi all prophesy within the same period -- the last three books of the Old Testament come together, as it were, in time. They prophesied roughly 500 to 400 years before the Lord Jesus Christ came. They were the last men to speak before God spoke through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Haggai prophesied in three months. Zechariah prophesied in three years. Do you know what that tells me? That God uses different men, with different gifts, in different places, over different periods of time, for different purposes. Praise God, that we're not all the same, God uses all of us, we are each unique, He doesn't want us to copy someone else -- He wants us to be ourselves, indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God and He will use us as sanctified personalities.

Haggai's name means 'festive' or 'festival'. Don't know why that is, in fact not only do we not know why that is, we don't know much about Haggai. Like Habakkuk, and like many of the minor prophets, we don't know much about his background. We don't know where he came from, we don't know his lineage, his family -- all we know is that he has come out with Zerubbabel, out of Babylon, out of the exile -- he has been delivered with those people and now as he stands before us in this little prophesy, he is now an old man. I nearly said he's now a grey-headed man, but there's some that are old and they're not grey-headed, and there's some that are grey-headed and they're not old. But he's here, and it is amazing to see that we have never heard about this man Haggai, never heard about him before, we don't hear about him after. He has been in exile for the 70 years, perhaps, that the children of Judah have been in exile in Babylon, and God has been preparing this man for now, in his old-age, he's grey-headed, he has all the best years, perhaps, as far as he can see it behind him, yet God is now ready to use His man, Haggai. So much of the older generation believe that it's now up to the younger generation to do the work of God. Not so with Haggai. God was preparing this man, it's like Moses was being prepared for all those years, God had a purpose, God had only three months for this man to minister, his whole life was being prepared for it -- but he was willing to fit into God's purpose, God's plan, if it only meant three months.

Rather than preaching, like the other minor prophets about compromise within society, within religion, within government or corruption within the whole of the globe of society -- this man Haggai is not talking about anything like that, but what he does prophesy about is complacency. I've called him 'The Prophet of Priorities'. There are four messages that Haggai has within his two chapters of a book. The first one begins in verse one of chapter one. And each message, each of the four messages, begin with the date of when they were given. Look at chapter one verse one, it says: "In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet". Now in our day and age this date that's being given here is the equivalent of the 29th of August 520 BC, 29 August. Then if you turn to chapter two and verse one you see a second message to the people: "In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the Lord by the prophet Haggai, saying". That is the 17th of October 520 BC. Then the third message is found beginning at verse ten of chapter two: "In the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius came the word of the Lord by Haggai". December 18th 520 BC. And the fourth message begins in verse twenty of chapter two and it was given on the same day, the 18th of December 520 BC. So Haggai's whole message, his four sermons if you like, that were given to these people, were over a space of three months: August 29th, October 17th, December 18th 520 BC. Incidentally, when you go home, or maybe before you come back here next week, it would be great if you could read the book of Ezra. Because the book of Ezra is the whole historic background and context of what we are reading about in Haggai -- Ezra tells us of how the children of Judah came out of Babylon, how they got back to the land of Jerusalem.



Now let me give you a little bit of historical background about what has been happening here since we left Habakkuk. Of course we know that all the prophecies, all the prophecies that came through Habakkuk, they were going to come to pass. The Lord said 'I will work a work in your day', and God did work it. God told him, 'I'm going to raise up the Chaldeans, they're going to come in like a flood, they're going to take you all and take you captives, exile you to the land of Babylon'. Now we're here in Haggai, a post-exilic prophet, and Judah, the nation of Judah, has now returned from Babylon it's the year 536 BC, they have spent 70 years in captivity in Babylon. You remember that we learnt that the Babylonian Empire had been defeated by the Medo-Persian Empire, we found that in the book of Daniel. Remember Belshazzar in his drunken orgy, and all of a sudden God told him that his days were numbered, he was found wanting and then it says that this man Cyrus came in and he conquered the whole of that Empire. He took over, he became God's man. And when Cyrus came in, and when the Medo-Persian Empire was reigning, the Judean exiles were under the control of King Cyrus and King Cyrus allowed them to return from Babylon

Pre-Exile

<u>To Israel</u>	<u>To Judah</u>	<u>To Assyria</u>	<u>To Edom</u>
Hos, Amos	Lam, Mic Isa, Jer, Joel Zep, Hab	Jon, Nah	Obadiah

Exile

From Babylon
Ezekiel, Daniel

Post-Exile

To Jerusalem
Hag, Zech, Mal

to Jerusalem, all 50,000 of the remnant. Are you with me so far? They come from Babylon back to Jerusalem. Cyrus was gracious enough towards them to let them begin to rebuild their temple. They began to rebuild the altar of offering, they put the foundations of the temple down, but the Jews didn't want those volunteers of the Samaritans that we read about in Ezra chapter three and four -- they didn't want the Samaritan's help. 'We're going to build our temple, we're going to build it ourselves and you mongrel Samaritans are not going to have anything to do with it.' Now because of that the Samaritans smarted. They wanted to be part of this temple, so they ran to King Cyrus, they told all sorts of lies about what was going on, they concocted plots. And what happened was, the building of this temple was delayed because of that action sixteen years. And for sixteen years the foundations of the temple became silted and overgrown with weeds, simply because the Judean children were discouraged because of the opposition of the Samaritans -- read about it in Ezra chapter 4. For sixteen years no work was done to the temple, all there were, were the foundations lying there.

Time passed, and eventually Cyrus died, his son committed suicide and then, after all that, Darius the first came into power. And when he came into rule, he found the decree of King Cyrus. What was his decree? His decree was that the children of Judah were allowed to come back from Babylon to Jerusalem, but also they were allowed to rebuild their temple. Darius the first found it again and because of that he paved the way so that the children of Judah could now begin again, after sixteen years, begin rebuilding their temple. But there was a problem -- because after these sixteen years the Jews had become apathetic. Sixteen years had gone by, they were discouraged and disappointed because they couldn't build it in the beginning because of the Samaritans, and now they had got themselves into this remorseful situation; where they were weighed down by all the negatives of the situation that they couldn't, even when they were permitted, bring themselves to rebuilding God's temple. So, in the second year of Darius, 520 BC, where we are now, Haggai began to prophesy. Within four weeks of this man opening his mouth, the work of God had begun in the temple. That's effective, now. Haggai opened his mouth, he told the message as we've seen in chapter one and verse thirteen -- God's message for God's man at God's time. He told it as God had told it to him, and eventually work had started, in four weeks, and eventually the temple had been erected.

If you want to know what type of temple it was, it was Zerubbabel's temple -- that's what it's known as -- it began the age, the temple age, of the second temple period. Now the temple doesn't seem to have been as extravagant and beautiful as Solomon's temple, it doesn't even seem to have had at this point the glory of God, or the Ark of the Covenant. But nevertheless, God's word, when it came at God's time, and more importantly when it was obeyed by God's people, had God's purpose in result.

The two key verses of this book, as you'll notice as we go through them, is verse 14 of chapter one: "And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God". The second key verse, chapter 2 and verse 9: "The glory of this latter house", the latter temple, "shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts". Now I want you to notice, before we get into studying verse by verse this first chapter, the timing of this prophet of Haggai. God's message, as I have said, comes in God's time and we have seen from verse thirteen that this was God's message, by God's messenger. Why had it come in God's time? Well as we look at this month, and this day in the month that we're reading, that this message was given: it was the sixth month, the month of Elul. Now that indicates to me, that the month before Elul was the month when the whole of Judah would have remembered the destruction of the temple before they went into Babylon. So temples were in their head, they were already thinking about temples, and in fact they possibly were mourning and smarting at the fact that 70 years previous, they had lost their prize possession, the place where they saw God dwelt, their temple. Secondly, the timing when this prophecy was given was significant because it was the first day of that month. And upon the first day of the month, it was almost like a Sabbath, it was a day of rest, it was a holy day, it was a day when they would worship God, but more than all that for our context, it was a day were the people came to listen to what the message of God was, through the prophet of God. So if you like, Haggai had a captive audience.

This is what we need today, friends. God had prepared the people for God's word. You need to be prepared for God's word, but the people that come into this place that don't even know God in Christ, they need to be prepared to hear it by the Spirit of God. That when the seed of the word is given, and thrown out, that it falls onto good ground -- only God can do that, and He only does it in answer to our prayers. What timing it was. And in verse one, let's look at it first of all, we see that this prophesy was directed to two people specifically, Zerubbabel and Joshua. Zerubbabel was the civil leader of Judah, he was the political head-man, Zerubbabel. Joshua was the high priest, he was the religious leader at the time. Why was this message given specifically to them? Well, if you look at the lineage of Zerubbabel you find that he was an heir to the King David, to the Davidic throne. And that means that Zerubbabel was in the Messianic line, he was related in lineage to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Joshua, of course, was the high priest. He was important because he was the man

that would lead God's people, hopefully, back to God. But why does He give them this message? Why does He not just ignore them, come straight to the people, say it as it is and deliver the message for the people, to the people directly? Do you know why? Because God knows, as He knows in any age, and in any church, that if He can ignite the vision of the leadership, it will inspire the people. What was it Wesley said? "If your pulpit is on fire, they'll come to watch you burn".

Let's look at the first point on your sheet, from verses two to four, 'The Rebuke for Procrastination'. Verses two to four: "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built. Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house", My house, "lies waste?" God, through Haggai, was bringing a message and God's message was a message of rebuke -- rebuke for procrastination. They were putting something off. How do we know that? What do they keep repeating? 'The time is not come, the time is not come, it's not right, the atmosphere, the environment just isn't right for this now, Lord. The time hasn't come.' And theoretically what they were saying to God is: 'Your time has not come'. And what a strong rebuke God gave the people. Why? Because of two reasons. The first reason for the procrastination was this: a prophetic misunderstanding. And secondly: a pre-occupying materialism.

Let's deal with the first one first of all: the prophetic misunderstanding. You see these repatriated Jews, the remnant of 50,000 that had come out of Babylon, as they came out, I believe that they accepted a situation with a fatalistic resignation. They believed, as they were in a prophetic sense, that they could do nothing about their situation and their predicament before God. They had a wrong reaction to prophecy. You see, if you were to go back into your Old Testament you would see that Jeremiah prophesied a 70 year period when there would be desolations in the city of Jerusalem, Jeremiah 25. Also Daniel, in Daniel 9:1&2, prophesied that there would be a period of 70 years desolations within Jerusalem -- Zechariah also, in chapter 1 and verse 12. And this remnant of 50,000 Jews that came out of Babylon they believed, mistakenly, that they were in that period. And therefore, if they were in that period, they could not rebuild the temple because the 70 year period had not elapsed, it hadn't run out. So they saw it, that if they began to put a brick upon a brick, to build this temple, they would be outside God's calendar and it paralysed them into a wrong attitude to prophecy. How do I know that? Chapter 1 and verse 2 spells it out, if you know the rest of the Scriptures as a background to it, they say 'Lord, the time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built' -- how would they know? Why would they say that to God? Simply because they believed that they had God's word on the thing, that the 70 years had not passed -- 'Lord, the time for it to happen hasn't come'.

It's interesting that God told them what they were thinking. You know the best message, and the best preaching that this world knows is when you're able to tell people what they're thinking. Remember the Lord Jesus Christ with the woman at the well in John chapter 4? And she said that she hadn't a husband, and He said, 'You've said well because you've had some already and the one that you're with, he isn't your husband'. And she looked into His eyes and she said, 'I perceive that Thou art a prophet!' Remember the cry? 'Come see a man that told me all that ever I did!' God was telling them what they were thinking, they were paralysed, they stood, they had given in to a feeling of hopelessness, they were in a hopeless inability -- all the effort they could see was for no use, they would have to wait until God's prophetic calendar had reached its destiny. And the result was within God's people a total indifference, and God's work was what suffered.

Was this not the attitude of the gruff old Dr. Ryland (sp?) of Northampton? When he reprimanded that young pioneer missionary William Carey, and he said to him: 'Young man, sit down, and when God pleases to convert the heathen He'll do it without your aid or mine'. This is the attitude of those who believe that it's pointless to hope for God in these last days to move, because no such thing is prophesied within the word of God. The word of God does not foresee a revival before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ -- so why should we pray for it now, why should we hope for it now? Let me ask you a question: was the Reformation prophesied? Was the 1859 revival prophesied within the word of God? The Welsh revival, the Scottish

revival, European revivals, the revivals that are happening now in our world, are they prophesied? No! Of course they're not! So why should God prophesy one that will happen before Christ comes? This is the predicament that they got themselves in, and I wonder at times can we, as we know so much about prophecy, can we get into that situation -- where we're sitting waiting for the Lord to come, as we ought, but it has brought us into a paralysed inability to work for God, because we believe it's pointless. I can think of nothing worse to chill praying, to discourage preaching than to say that God can no longer move.

But secondly, not only was there a prophetic misunderstanding, but there was a pre-occupying materialism that we find in verse four. God replied to them, and answered, 'Is it time for you, if it's not time to build My temple, well then is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses and My house -- this house -- lie waste?' And God was pointing out three things to these people, first of all: your selfishness. He says, 'Think for a moment of the time, and the money, and the energy and enthusiasm that you spend on your own houses, cieled houses -- that means they were luxurious on their day, they may well even have had gardens on the roof -- look at the time that you spend on them, the time that you spend in them and here is My house, God's house -- the chiefest house of all -- and it lies waste!' I don't even need to apply that, do I? Secondly, God reprimanded them for their indifference. 'It's lying waste!' Now don't forget that they had been 70 years in captivity, and they didn't need a temple because they couldn't have a temple -- and when they come out of captivity they're indifferent to the need of it because they've been without it for so long. My friend, I wonder sometimes, when we, and when I in my personal life am without blessing for so long, I get used to it, I become indifferent to it -- so much so that I become unconscious to it!

Thirdly, there were their hostile neighbours, remember the Samaritans? And they gave opposition, and it wasn't particularly strong opposition -- the Jews had put up with bigger opposition in the past, but because they were downtrodden, because they were hopeless, because they had this misunderstanding of prophecy, they gave in at the first fight. Oh, let us not today do that. My friend, our God is as great as He ever has been. Our God can do as much as He ever had, let us not fall into a prophetic misunderstanding or be preoccupied with materialism. And the tragedy is this: that the people got into such a state, that you notice in that verse -- verse 2 -- that God does not call them 'My people', He says, 'this people...this people'. God gave them a rebuke for their procrastination.

But secondly, look at this: verse 5 and 6, there was 'The Reaping of Poverty'. And God said to them, "Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." They were reaping nothing but absolute poverty. And what Haggai is saying here, and the Spirit of God is saying through him, that we are the ones who lose out, not God! We cannot rob God, and in the long run we are the ones who will suffer. So what God did was, He began to remove from them all their material possessions. First, verse six shows He hit agriculture. He says, 'You plant much, but you harvest little'. Secondly, He hit the economy. The economy in their day, from this verse we see, could not meet individual people's needs. And as the saying goes: 'My take-home pay will not take me home'. And that's what happened in that day: God robbed them of all that they had, and finally inflation was so much that the money that they put into their pockets -- it was as if they had holes in it, because it fell out through inflation.

This all, and I want you to note this, was direct from God. It was direct from the hand of God, God did it, and indeed God does it when men and women turn away from Him -- and certain things that come into their lives can be, not always are, but can be because they have turned their back upon God and His Christ. How do I know that? Well if we had time, we could look at Leviticus chapter 26 where Moses, way before Haggai, predicted in Leviticus 26 that this would happen -- I'll read it to you, verse 18: "And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass: And your strength shall be spent in

vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits". God prophesied it would happen if they disobeyed Him. Then again in Deuteronomy 28 and verse 38, God says, "Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, and shalt gather but little in; for the locust shall consume it. Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them. Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy coasts, but thou shalt not anoint thyself with the oil; for thine olive shall cast his fruit". There is the law of the harvest within scripture and I've mentioned it so many times, and what you sow, you reap. But you see in the Old Testament, there is another law of the harvest and it's this: that if you sow something unworthily, you will never reap. That's part of the deal! And what was happening is, and I liken it spiritually [to] today, so much of the Gospel is preached, so much is going on, there is perhaps an explosion of the Gospel in our world, our Western world today that there has never been before -- but we sow so much, but we reap so little. That means that there's something wrong.

Thirdly, there was a 'Reason for their Poverty' and we see that in verses 9 to 11: "Ye looked for much, and, lo it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands". There was a reason for the poverty -- God, by His own hand, verse 10, was holding back the rain. And in Palestine, as you would know, you need a lot of rain if you're going to have crops. And because, in verse 10, God was holding back the rain, verse 11 the result was that the crops failed. God was saying in verse 9, [that] 'If you don't take as much care over My house, God's house, as your own house I will blow all your prosperity, all your luxury, all your pleasure away'. God intervened in the life of Judah and there was an economic disaster. The people couldn't till the fields any longer, they toiled in the fields night after night, day after day but they got nothing for it, naught came. And God, today, to our world, to our generation and in a spiritual sense to the church of Jesus Christ still works like this -- 'You'll toil, you'll reap, you'll work, you'll sweat but you'll get little in return if you're not obedient'.

We mentioned last evening the BSE crisis, oh I wonder is the BSE crisis for the farmers in our land (and I do not despise them, because my father-in-law is one) -- but the farmers in our land, they've done so well for so long and many of them have taken their eyes off God and Christ. Is there a purpose to everything or are there just coincidences? Could it be? It is a law, isn't it? That it's when people are in their direst need that they're more likely to look up to Christ. They're more likely to come to God when they need something and when their physical need shouts out, like a loudhailer, to their spiritual need. What was it C. S. Lewis said? 'Pain is the megaphone of God'. Oh, there's been financial crises, the stock exchange has fallen, there may be the 'Millennium Bug' coming soon. But God is saying, 'I am God, and you are still my puny creature -- you are not infinite, you are not eternal, you will pass away, but My word and My being will never pass away, and don't forget it!' It says in verse 9, that they looked for much, and I wonder was that a type of description of faith. They looked for much and after they sowed they were expecting something to come back. They were looking for things to happen, but they were not willing to give the obedient cost to God that would necessitate the covenant, that when you give, God will give back to you. They weren't willing for the cost. We sow a lot, we expect a lot -- and that's good -- but friends if you're not willing to give everything, we will reap nothing.

Let's look fourthly at 'The Remedy for the Poverty'. There was a remedy for this poverty, it's found in verse 5, then it's found in verse 7 and then it's found again in verse 8. And what does God say, over again and again and again: 'Consider your ways! Consider your ways! Consider your ways!' This is all down to one thing, there is one reason it's quite easy to understand -- but it may be extremely difficult for you or I, or the Judeans to implement -- that all this was because of their lack of obedience. A brother was even saying to me

today that the Christian life can be summed up in that line of a hymn, it's as simple as this but it's as difficult: 'Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey'. And in verse 7 God, we see, was speaking a second time: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways.", and I believe that God, through His word, in these days is speaking to certain people and He is working in some of our lives and He is telling us to consider our ways, to reflect upon our priorities, to readjust our lives and face to God's will. And if we don't listen, if we don't listen -- there will be dire consequences. God is not obliged to speak once, let alone speak twice.

My friend, if God is speaking to you about your heart, about personal revival in your life and giving everything to your God, and serving Him, and seeing His Spirit being manifest in your daily walk and with those around you -- listen to Him, listen: consider your ways! Do something about it! Repent Christian or non-Christian alike of your sins, have done with it, forsake them, lay down those things that so easily beset you -- that you can run the race, so that you can win the prize, don't forfeit it for this life! What was it our blessed Lord Jesus Christ said? Matthew chapter 6 and verse 33, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you'. But if you don't follow, child of God if you don't follow after that, Haggai teaches that even those things, if we try and add them to ourselves, by ourselves, they could all be taken away in a flash.

But fifthly there was 'The Renewal of Purpose'. The renewal of purpose found in verses 12 to 15, "Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people" -- Look! Underline this! -- "obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord. Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message", and that's what we need today, "unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord. And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant", all 50,000 of these children of Judah, "and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God". There was a renewal of the purpose. And the people responded to God's word, we need to respond to God's word -- not just listen to it, not just hide it in our heads, but like Mary, hide it in our hearts and work upon it, act upon it. It says in verse 13 that they obeyed the voice of the Lord, and let me say this: don't think that was easy for them. Because they had just come out of 70 years into captivity, they had spent the last 16 years despondent - - and maybe you're here and in your Christian life, you've spent a sum of that despondent yourself. But can I say this: they spent 16 years in spiritual lukewarmness, but it took them only four weeks to get up and to get started. Don't you believe the lie of the devil that you'll need to be more spiritual, and it's going to take weeks, it's going to take months. Don't get me wrong, spiritual growth does take time, maturity does take time: but the devil would love you to know that you can't do it -- but the Spirit of God can do anything! And in four weeks they had began work on this temple, because the cry of Satan to their hearts and minds was this: 'The time hasn't come'. Don't believe a word of it. My friend, if God has been speaking to you about prayer, the time has come to start praying -- I mean start praying now. If God has spoken to you about spreading the Gospel, don't wait till you feel you're able to do it, don't wait till you do a course on it -- the time is now. If God is speaking to us about our need in this fellowship for prayer and for seeking the face of God for blessing -- the time is now! For let's face it, how long have we got? And if we tell those that are unsaved, 'Now's the day of salvation, now is the accepted time', are we not hypocrites when it comes to the sanctified life before God when we say, 'Tomorrow will do'.

Oh, they had the renewed purpose, but I don't want you to miss this fact: that God told them of His assurance first of all. Because in verse 12, I beg your pardon, verse 13 God says this to them: 'I am with you'. He was with them, even at that moment in time, He was saying, 'I am with you, but you've got to act upon My presence in your life, or nothing will happen'. So it's not enough simply to be saved, it's enough to get you to heaven, but it's not enough to please God. You've got to be saved and act, and the word of God says, 'Work out your salvation day by day'.

Oh, these words are beautiful. We find them throughout the whole of the scripture. God said them to Isaac and to Jacob in Genesis 26 and 28. God said it to Moses just before he was going to deliver Israel in Exodus 4, 'I am with you'. God said it to Joshua as he was about to go into the land, the promised land of Canaan, 'I am with you, Joshua'. He told Jeremiah as a child, when He called him to be a prophet to the nations, 'Jeremiah, I am with you'. He told it to Israel through their times of trouble in Isaiah chapter 43 He said, 'I will be with you'. He said to the disciples in the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate God, when He told them, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel and I will be with you'. To Paul He said, as he went to Corinth not knowing what he was going to face, He said, 'Paul, I am with you'. And God says to His church, and to His child that is hurting today, and to the child that wants to do something for God -- 'Go and do it and I am with you!'

It says that the Lord stirred Zerubbabel, Joshua and all the people and you know what that tells me, quickly: first of all this, that the leadership was stirred from indifference to obey God's voice -- and someone said this: 'A people can only rise as high as the leadership is willing to take them'. Secondly, they weren't just stirred for a minute, not just an emotional experience in a meeting but something that changed their lives and made them able to persevere in the work of God till the temple was built. They came, thirdly, and did the work, they acted upon what God had told them, they obeyed -- and that means for all of us here this evening, there is something for us to do! And on the 21st of December 520 BC the work began on the temple. And Judah responded and in a very short time, even though they had been asleep for 16 years they considered their ways, they obeyed God. And do you know what it says? To all the children of God, to forget about the wasted years and get up and break-up the fallow ground and seek the face of God -- 'I will restore the years that the locusts have eaten'. Judah had to rethink its priorities. The temple of God today is the church of the living God -- let me ask you as we close: how much building is going on?

Our Father, help us in these days not to be weary in well-doing. Help us not to faint, for we will reap in due season if we faint not. But Lord, help us as we sow and as we labour and as we work to always know, and be assured that within our lives that we are in full obedience to Christ. Otherwise, Lord, the tragedy will be that we will sow and we will bring in little. But Lord, may [it be as] it was in Haggai's day, that the glory of the latter house may be greater than that of the former. Lord give us a hope, that the best down here is yet to come. Bless us now as we part, for Christ's sake, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - May 2000

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Majoring On The Minors: Haggai - Chapter 2

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Haggai 2:1-9

Date: Seventh month, twenty-first day (17th October 520BC)

1. *A Backward Look – God's Old Temple (verses 1-3)*
2. *An Upward Look – God's Presence and Promise (verses 4-5)*
3. *A Forward Look – God's Prophecies (verses 6-9)*

Let me give you a warm welcome to our Bible study here in the Iron Hall Assembly. We're very glad to see you this evening and we trust that as we meet around God's word, and see what this little book that we've been studying over the past few weeks, the book of Haggai, has to say to us - not only individually, but as a nation and as a church - that we are blessed in the presence of God as we hear from His voice.

The book of Haggai, Haggai and chapter 2, and we're reading from verse 1. You'll remember that last Monday evening we dealt with the whole of chapter 1, right down to verse 15. And just to recap for a moment, you saw that these children of Judah had come out of captivity, from seventy years captivity in Babylon, they'd been given their freedom. But as they came out they were discouraged, they had been seventy years without a temple. They've come out and the Emperor, Cyrus of Medo-Persia, that had brought them out of Babylon and allowed them to go back to their home of Israel, he now permitted by an edict that they were now allowed to rebuild their own temple. You remember that they began to rebuild, they had the foundations of the temple built and the Samaritans came along - you can read about it in Ezra, we'll look at it in a few moments later - and the Samaritans came along and said, 'You've no right to build this temple', and one of the Samaritans wrote a letter to King Cyrus to discourage this. And then eventually Darius came into power, Darius the first, and when the Samaritans were creating a furore about these Judeans building the temple again, he went back to look in all the legislation of the government and he found there that, yes, there was an agreement, for Cyrus said that they could build the temple again. But what happened was that the Judeans were so discouraged that after those sixteen years, even though they were allowed to rebuild, they hadn't got the guts to do it.

And now we are in chapter 2 of the book of Haggai - and there are many commands that were given by Haggai to this discouraged people, you remember the very famous one that he repeated three times over in chapter 1, 'Consider your ways! Consider your ways! Consider your ways!'. And we left off in verse 14 and 15 where we see the work of the Holy Ghost beginning to happen: 'And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, the governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech'. And when the leaders were stirred, the people began to be stirred. And as we enter into chapter 2 and verse 1, we see what began to happen: "In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the Lord by the prophet Haggai, saying, Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying, Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? And how do ye see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and 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 you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of

all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with the glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than that of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts".

If the first sermon that we were given by Haggai - and you remember that I told you last Monday evening that this book of two chapters is made up of four sermons, that were given by Haggai. The first sermon we thought about last week, the second sermon we will think about this week, and the next two sermons were both given - you remember - on the same day. And if the first sermon that we thought about last Monday evening was a message of rebuke, this second sermon - chapter 2 verses 1 to 9 - is a message of encouragement. Haggai's first message, as we read in verse 14, it stirred the whole nation of Judah. It started at the top of the leadership and then it worked down right to the very people - and it stirred them out of their idleness. We see it in chapter 1 and verse 14, it motivated them out of their lethargy, their laziness, to get up and to start building the temple again. And in chapter 2 we can almost hear the sound of the workmen beginning to rebuild, after sixty years without a temple they begin to clean away all the rubble, they begin to build on the foundations that were laid sixteen years before this day in Jerusalem.

So many discouragements they had, so many setbacks they were given, but at last they're ready - they have heard the word of God, the word of God has touched their hearts, the word of God has breathed new life into their discouraged spirits, and they're ready with their hammers and their chisels - ready to build the temple again. But...believe it or not there's another problem. Because less than a month after the work had begun on the temple once more, it was interrupted again - not by enemies, not by a false religion but, believe it or not, by three religious festivals in the land of Israel's calendar. You see, it says in verse 1 that the date of this message - the second sermon of Haggai - it was given in the seventh month which is the month of Tishri, our months of September and October. You see, the Feast of Trumpets was on the first day of the month of Tishri, on the tenth day of the month of Tishri was the day of atonement, on the fifteenth day of the month right through to the twenty-first day of the month there was the Feast of Tabernacles. And just as the children of Judah were ready - they'd got over the discouragements of the Samaritans around them, they'd got over the discouragements of the memories of their seventy years in captivity, perhaps they'd got over, you remember we thought about it last week, about their misconceptions of Biblical prophecy, they thought that it wasn't in God's calendar that they would be able to build the temple, but they got over all of that - and they're ready to build, they're raring to go and all of a sudden these festivals interrupt their work.

Haggai knew that another - even if it was only one more interruption - would totally discourage the people. He knew, like you know, that when you're in the Christian life and sometimes things are going well, and you begin to get reading your Bible well and studying it and getting into it, you're maybe beginning to get a hold on prayer, things are starting to go well, you're going to the meetings, and all of a sudden - bang! A discouragement comes across your path and you get disheartened. Now Haggai knew that this people of Judah had been up against a lot. They had been discouraged now for 86 years since the day that they had gone into captivity and because of that on this day, on the last day of the feast, Haggai comes - he steps in with a great message of encouragement for God's people, right from the Lord. It's the final day of the Feast of Tabernacles, in our calendar it's the 17th of October 520BC - and just as we saw last week that the context and the background of the message of chapter 1 was so important, because you remember he had a captive audience because the people were thinking about the temple that they had lost in the past, before the captivity - and in the same way, the context and the backdrop for this message is so relevant, and comes just at the right time.

In Leviticus chapter 23 verses 34 to 44, we have an account of what the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths, really is. It's also called, within the scriptures, the Feast of Ingathering. What it was, was the final religious celebration on Israel's religious calendar. They commemorated first of all the end of the autumn harvest, secondly they commemorated the ingathering of all the crops, thirdly it was a remembrance that, for

the forty years that the children of Israel were in the wilderness, that God looked after them and took care of them when they lived in the tents.

Let me share with you for a few moments, just to give you an idea of what they did on this day, some of the rituals of the Feast of Booths. For seven days the people lived in little booths, little tents constructed from palms trees and willows and leaf trees and branches, and they were all decorated with beautiful fruit from the harvest. But every day of those seven days there was a procession that went to the Gihon Spring, where the priest would fill the golden pitcher with water. He would return to God's temple and then he would pour that water upon the altar - and for the Judeans this was a sign, it was an object lesson, to tell them to remember that when they were in the wilderness for forty years, God in His supernatural way provided water for them. The festival ended and the people all gathered together and had a great religious, festive celebration, a great time of happiness, a great time of rejoicing in God and what God had done. But...this day, this day that Haggai gave this message, on the 17th of October 520BC, it was still the last day of this feast. They still did the same things, they went to the Gihon River, they did the same ritual of pouring the pitcher out on the altar and they came together - but there was no rejoicing. The joy was missing, because they had no temple to go to. It was not a joyful festivity, their crops at this time were actually destroyed, they had nothing to celebrate from God where that was concerned. Their temple wasn't completed and all that they could do on this occasion - some of them could remember when they were in captivity - but there was others that were older, and could remember when they came to Solomon's Temple, where there was great joy, great festivities, and they had, as they could see, a place where they could come to worship God and to seek His face.

Can I ask you this evening - are you a discouraged Christian? Are you like these Judeans? They were discouraged, every time they felt they were getting somewhere, whether it was with their nation, or with their God, or with their temple - something came along their path to thwart it. Do you no longer have joy in our celebrations? When you come to the meetings, when you come to the prayer meeting - or when you absent yourself from the prayer meeting - or you come to the Lord's Table, has that joy, has that celebration, has that rejoicing gone out, because of disappointments and discouragements in your life? Or is it, like these Judeans that they look back into their history, and some of them could look back 86 years to when they were taken into captivity, but at that moment they had a glorious temple, but now they had no temple. And they were looking back to the good old days when all the nations came together to worship God in the beautiful place, and God's glory was there, and there was real blessing, there was real salvation, there was real consecration, there was a revival perhaps. Can you remember great days - can you? Can you remember the good old days? I'm sure that there are some here and they can remember great days, great days of blessing. But when we look at a day in which we live today, and we look back at those days - we can do nothing but be discouraged.

Haggai knew that this people was thirsty, this people was hungry, this people was weary in the desert looking for satisfaction because of all their disappointments - and so he comes, and like the pouring of the water upon the altar in the temple, he brings this message to the people that don't have a temple. But it's like fresh water to their souls, and the first thing he does is found in our first point. He talks to them about a backward look, found in verses 1 to 3. Verses 1 and verse 2 are the introduction and then, in verse 3, he says this: 'Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? And how do ye see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?'

You see, this message that Haggai was bringing here, the first point of his message was this: you have a backward look. You're looking to God's old temple. God's leadership - Zerubbabel, Joshua - all the people were living in difficult days, but they were all remembering the good old days, they were all harping back, like many people do today and sometimes I can't blame them! The great crusades, the great evangelists, the great number of people that were being converted, the great standards that the church had.

They were looking back, if you turn with me to the book of Ezra chapter 3 - and you'll remember, I told you last week, that to get the historical background of the book of Haggai you need to read the book of Ezra. Ezra chapter 3 and verse 12, and Ezra tells us who some of the people were that came out of the seventy years captivity in Babylon. And in verse 12 of chapter 3 of Ezra he says this: 'But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy'. Ezra says that there were two types of people that came out the captivity in Babylon. And there are those two types of people that - as Haggai is delivering this message in chapter 2 - the people who are listening, there are two types of them. There are the young people who can't remember the old days of the old temple, and then there are the older people who can remember, as Ezra says, this first house in all its glory - but note the difference. That the old people that can remember the first house in all its glory are weeping and crying aloud, but the young people are singing for joy. Why is that? You see, immediately, when the old people came out of captivity in Babylon for seventy years, they received the edict of King Cyrus to rebuild the temple and their hopes were built up. They were encouraged and immediately they could remember Solomon's Temple, and they envisaged the new temple as possessing all the glories that they had seen in Solomon's. But when the building started, and when brick was put upon brick, and when all the interior things were put into the temple and it was beginning to take form they started to see, to their amazement and to their disappointment, that this new temple was absolutely nothing compared to Solomon's because they could remember. And therefore Haggai, Haggai knew, he anticipated their disappointment and he asked them three questions in verse three, look down at it. He says first of all to them: 'Who is left among you that saw this house in its first glory?'. Think about it, many of the old folk - the old men and old women that were standing around listening to Haggai - many of them had stood and witnessed the beautiful temple of Solomon. What was it like? Well it was twice the size of the tabernacle. Imagine this, it helps to close your eyes and try to think about it: ninety feet long, thirty feet wide, forty five feet high, striking in all its beauty because of the white limestone it was built with, because of the cedar that were upon the walls, because of the gold exterior. The entire interior of the temple was covered with cedar walls, the floorboards were pine, all of it was overlaid in gold. If you had went into the Holy Place, it was sixty feet long, it was decorated on the walls with carved gourds, and cherubim, and palm trees, and carved open flowers. There were gold chains that covered across the doors leading from the Holy Place to the Holy of Holies - and the Holy Place contained ten golden lamp stands, and ten golden tables of showbread. And, if you had gone out of the outer court of the temple into the Holiest Place and into the Holy of Holies - think of this! - a thirty foot cube, all overlaid with gold, two massive cherubim made of olive wood, carved in gold extended the length of the whole room, whose wings outstretched itself, whose tips touched one another. The walls of the temple, decorated with beautiful carvings - years ago someone estimated, now it was years ago, the expense of just the Holiest of all, just that one thirty foot room, and they said it came to twenty million dollars!

Put yourself in these peoples shoes, this is what they could remember! This great sight, this glorious temple in all of its beauty, but as far as they could see - even though they thought God was working in the building of this new temple - this new temple faded into insignificance in comparison with the old one.

There were five differences between the old and the new. This new temple, Zerubbabel's temple, didn't have the ark of the covenant. Zerubbabel's temple didn't have the holy fire, Zerubbabel's temple didn't have the Shekinah, the light, glory manifest of God. Fourthly it didn't have the spirit of prophecy, in other words, the Holy Spirit. And fifthly it didn't have the urim and the thummim - the guidance of God Himself. And these old men and these old women knew it, and as they looked upon it they were discouraged and Haggai knew it. That's why he asked them: 'Can any of you, any left among you that saw it?', and then secondly he asked them in verse 3: 'And how do you see it now?'

'Remember the old temple? Well you can remember it - now tell me, tell me how you see the new temple'. Of course you know their answer, they didn't need to answer it, they saw it as obviously inferior to the old

temple. So thirdly he asks the question in verse 3: 'Is it not in your eyes in comparison with it as nothing?'. And if you could hear the large crowd answer him, they would all shout: 'Yes! It's nothing! Expect us to settle for this? We've known better than this from God, we've better memories than this from God, do you expect us to take the second best in comparison?'. Do you feel like that?

I address the older folk - and I'll not define that! But the older folk this evening, I know there's people in our gathering here and they can remember W.P. Nicholson. You can remember great days can't you? And I'm sure it is such a discouragement to your heart to see the days in which we live, to see the disappointments, the discouragements, how the work of God to the human, fleshly eyes seems not to be going forward - nothing seems to be happening in the same ways. Can I say this? Memories can be encouraging, but they can also be discouraging. You see, these children dwelt needlessly on past blessings. Can I say this? That this was Satan's subtle plan, this was his work - why? Because it seemed right for the Judeans to make much of the glorious past and the glorious temple, but it was obvious that Satan wanted to minimize and to make nothing of the wonderful work of revival that was beginning to happen in the peoples lives. Do you know what happened? In verse 14 of chapter 1, Satan saw that the people were beginning to be stirred, so he said: 'Ah! Remember the old days? You'll never have days like that again. Those days will never come back and if you're hoping for them, and if a preacher's telling you it's possible, forget about it! Those days are gone long ago!' - and he's trying to minimize, and he's trying to blow out, to extinguish the flame of God, no matter how small it was, that was beginning to be lit in the hearts of His own children.

Let me say this: if God is working, no matter in how small a way, it cannot be inferior. It's either God working, or God not working! But if it's God working, no matter how small it is, we cannot look down on it because it's God! It is the divine plan, it's from the divine sovereign will, and we must never despise the day of small things. The fact was, that this was God's will, this was not a licence for them to sit back, but can you not see what I'm saying? God was going to bring these good days back, but they wanted it 'Bang!' like this - in a moment - they couldn't see that there was a progression, that things had to be done, that this fire of life within them had to come gradually and slowly, and God by His Spirit was gradually blowing His wind upon that little ember of a flame in their heart and their soul. But all they could think of was thinking back, 'It's not like the old days!'

My friend, if you get stuck in that gear you're in trouble. The old days were great, and no-one reads about them more than me - but the old days aren't coming back again I'm afraid. The old days are gone, you can't bring history back, but what you can do is bring God back. They looked back and all they could see was the old temple, but I want you to see that God through Haggai got them to look up! An upward look, verses 4 to 5: 'Yet now', God says, 'be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and 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 you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you' - an upward look. What was God saying? God was saying, 'My presence, children, and My promise, children, are with you'. What was He telling them to do? He was saying, 'My children, finish the task, children be encouraged'. Verse 4, what does He say? 'Be strong', they needed courage.

Remember the opposition that they faced in the past from the Samaritans? Those men - you can read about it when you go home, in Ezra chapter 5 and verse 3 - there were two men especially from the Samaritans that wrote a letter to King Darius, telling King Darius, that the Jews had no right to build a temple. Oh, they got so down, they got so discouraged, they thought, 'Well, I'll forget about that, it's not worth the bother!'. Do you feel like that sometimes? It could be the world, it could be Christians, it could be opposition within the assembly to you doing the work that you feel God is calling you to do. And all it takes is for one little bit of opposition, maybe from someone who can remember all the old times and you say, 'Well, that's the end of that. It's not worth it, it's not worth the hassle, it's not worth the cost!' - and these people were so discouraged. But then what happened was, Darius looked into the records of the nation, he searched in the archives and he

found the documentation of how Cyrus had told them that they were permitted to rebuild the temple. But they couldn't complete the task if they were going to be backward looking.

My friend, encourage yourself in the past - but for goodness sake, don't get anchored in it! There's a world today that is a generation, that is your generation, that is my generation, and they're going to hell as much as W.P. Nicholson's generation! And we thank God for Nicholson, but let me tell you this: he's six foot under now, and he's in glory, and he's not going to save our generation. Luther'll not do it, and Calvin'll not do it, and Moody'll not do it - we have to do it! And are we doing it? Oh, we must have an upward look and we cannot be discouraged in the work of the Lord, we must be encouraged. We must look upward, we must see what God has said to them, 'Be strong and work' - the two come together. Don't be discouraged and work, because you're wasting your time. Be strong and work, be encouraged in Me and work.

Do you remember when Moses had finished his work, when he had done all that God had told him and planned for him to do, and it was now time to pass on the buck to Joshua - imagine what he felt like. Maybe what I felt like when I came here! The shoes that you were trying to fill - how can I be like Moses? Moses! The man that brought Thy children out of captivity in Egypt! The man of miracles, the man that saw God up on the mount - how can I be like him? But what did God say to him? What God said to Haggai, what God said to the people - and what God says to you - 'Be strong and of a good courage, for what made Moses great will make you great Joshua, and will make Haggai great and will make us great and it is this: for I the Lord God am with thee'. These were only men brethren! Don't you ever forget that! They were men and women like you and me, and the only thing that made them great was that they knew their God, and they knew that their God was with them. Three times God said to Joshua - maybe he needed to hear it three times - 'I am with you, I am with you, I am with you', and He says it here in verse 4. 'Haggai, I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts' - and the Lord of Hosts is a title for God, and it means this: 'the Lord of armies'. The Lord of armies is with us! The God of war is our strength!

God's presence, but also there was God's promise. Because He talks about the covenant that He made with them in verse 4, when they came out of Egypt, that in the same way He delivered them then - and mind you they were not worthy of it. Do you remember all the murmuring, all the crying and they were in the wilderness and they were saying, 'I wish, Moses, you'd never took us out of Egypt'. But they were God's people, because God had sworn that He would save them. And we not only have God's presence for the time that we need encouragement and we need His presence, but even when we feel angry against God - praise God! - we've got His promise that He's with us, no matter what!

Do you remember the church in Philadelphia in the book of Revelation? They're described as having a little strength - a little strength. What does the Lord say? That His word, and His name, were with them and abided with them. He was the holy and the true One, right in their midst as He is in our midst today. And where two, or three are gathered together, He is here. Oh, what a blessed thought! Now let me say this, Christian: if you are indwelt with the Holy Spirit of God, filled with the Holy Spirit - and I wonder how many are, I wonder if I am - that experience whereby we cry unto God for the fullness of God's Spirit within us, if we are surrendered in all and yielded to God, you can be assured that no matter what you go through, no matter where God takes you, that you have God's presence and God's power - and it will perform.

These poor people looked backward and - praise God - God asked them to look upward, and He asks us to look upward this evening, to His presence and His promise. But the best is yet to be, because He asks them to look forward - verses 6 to 9 to God's prophecies: 'For thus saith the Lord of hosts' - the Lord, the God of Armies - 'Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with the glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than that of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts'.

Now I want you to be patient with me, because I want you to look at a whole lot of passages of scripture now and you're going to be flicking through - but that's good, it'll keep you awake! Verse 4, we saw that he was told to be strong because there was a promise, but there was a prospect - not just of God's presence, 'I am with you' - but there was a future promise of something, a hope that purified within him, that he had to look forward to and that he could build his faith upon. It's not blind faith, we build our faith upon God's promises and he says in verse 6: 'For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens' - when? In a little while. Now that phrase, 'in a little while', does not mean immediate, it doesn't mean right away, but what it does mean is: imminent. Not immediate, but imminent - in other words, it could happen at any time. Whatever Haggai's talking about, - and he does say it's the shaking of the earth, and everything that's in the earth, and the heavens - that could happen in our time and at any time!

Now what is this shaking that is talked about here? Some scholars look back to verse 5 and believe it was when God delivered the people from the land of Egypt and brought them to the promised land. But that's not what I believe it is. Some look back to Darius, when Darius made that edict that the people were allowed to begin their temple again, and they look to Ezra chapter 6 where it says that he gave permission and he told the Samaritans they weren't to discourage or to lay a hand on the people - that's not what I believe it is. Thirdly some scholars believe it's when God brought judgement upon the Persians, and then upon the Greeks, and then eventually upon the Romans, where the Lord was at the time when He was upon the earth, the empire that ruled - but that's not what I think it is. Indeed the context of this passage of Scripture is futuristic. It refers to something that will come in our future!

Turn with me to Zechariah chapter 14, Zechariah chapter 14 - quickly please. Zechariah 14 and verses 4 and 5, and speaking of the Messiah, speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, not in His first coming, but in His second coming - Zechariah says: 'And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee'. You could turn to Matthew chapter 24 and read it again, and if we turn to Revelation and chapter 16 you can read about there. Revelation 16, I'll just read it for you, save you turning to it for time. Verse 18 and verse 20: 'And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found'. And there is a day coming, the book of Daniel says in chapter 2, when a rock will be cut out, and God will throw that rock, which is Christ Jesus, to smash all the Gentile empires and kings that rule on the earth - and Jesus Christ shall reign over all! And where the Rock Christ Jesus will smash, none shall stand but He. And in Haggai chapter 2 and verse 6, we read these words: 'Yet once a little while', imminently, 'I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land' - and when we turn to Hebrews chapter 12, you don't need to turn to it, but the writer there actually uses that verse in Haggai chapter 2 and verse 6. In chapter 12 of Hebrews verse 26 we read this: 'Whose voice then shook' - speaking of when the Lord returns - 'shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain'. And in the book of 2 Peter we read about it, that not just when the Lord returns to the Mount of Olives will He shake the earth, but after the millennial reign and after the temple is set up again - the earth will shake once more, the earth and the heavens and everything will be in a ball of fire!

My unsaved friend this evening, my backslidden friend tonight, you need to flee from the wrath to come. You must turn to Christ, or you will never escape this awful dread that will be upon the earth imminently - in

other words we do not know when it will be - but praise God, look at the hope in verse 7 for the believer: '...and I will shake all nations, but the desire of all nations shall come!' What is the desire of all nations? Some people believe this verse refers to the millennial temple that we read about in Ezekiel chapter 40 to 48, and it may have an inference to that, because of the verse after it talking about silver being God's and gold being God's. But do you know what I believe this verse means? What is the desire of all nations? Isaiah chapter 2 tells us that the desire of all nations is universal peace, we know about that don't we? Isaiah tells us again, in chapter 11 and verse 4, that the desire of all the world is just government. Isaiah also tells us, and the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 8 and verse 11 tells us, that the desire of all the world - whether they realize it or not - is the knowledge of the true God. They don't want our God, because they don't believe He's the true God! Oh, and they desire God, they just don't know it - because they fill their desire with all the sin, all that they can run after, all the false gods, there is an emptiness within their soul that comes from their father Adam, and they will fill it up with anything and everything but God! But there is a day coming, when the desire of all the nations shall come, and Messiah will come to His temple, and Messiah will inhabit the earth, and the glory that is talked about in verse 9, that great Shekinah glory, will fill God's temple, and God's world - and all the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God. What a day that will be!

But do you know something? This prophecy has already been fulfilled in measure, because in verse 9 we read that the glory of the latter house shall be greater than that of the former, in other words this house that was being built at this time - Zerubbabel's temple - he says even though it's not dripping with gold like Solomon's temple, God says this temple's going to have more glory than Solomon's. Now what did He mean? He was talking about Zerubbabel's temple, He wasn't referring to the millennial temple, but He had to be talking about the one here He was addressing. Did you know that Herod's temple was a refurbishment of Zerubbabel's temple? And in Luke chapter 2 we read the story where our blessed Lord Jesus Christ in the form of a babe, was taken into that temple, and that temple saw the desire of all nations as a baby! And Christ came to it - did He not say that He was a greater than Solomon? And He is the greatness of the millennial temple, because He will fill it with all His glory, and God says that He will bring that peace to all nations that will flow like a river into the whole earth from Jerusalem, and from Christ and His temple.

Did the Lord not say that He was the desire of all nations, when He spoke in John chapter 7 and verse 37 and 38 when he said, 'In the last day' - and incidentally He said it on the day of the feast of tabernacles, 'in the last day, that great day of the feast', the same day, 'Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink'.

Friends this evening can you see those Judeans? Running down to the Gihon River, filling that canteen, that holy canteen, with water - bringing it back to the altar and pouring it on, and Jesus on the same day years later would say: 'I am that living water, drink of Me and you will never thirst again'.

Can I say this in closing? We Christians are a temple - and God no longer lives or dwells in temples made with hands, He doesn't dwell in the Iron Hall, He dwells in you and He dwells in me if we're saved. But as we look at this passage of Scripture there's three things I want to ask you in closing that is our duty, our duty as Christians and as the temple of the Holy Spirit that God has made: is God manifesting His body? Could 'Ichabod' be written upon our lives, that the glory has departed? You can read these when you go home, we haven't time, but in 1 Corinthians 6 verses 15 to 20, Paul encourages us to take away, like these Judeans, the rubble, the rubble away from the foundations of the temple, the rubble of sin, the debris that's in our lives, clear it all away! And secondly Paul, in Romans 8:29, says that each of us are a stone in the building, we're so important, but we will only fit into the building if we're continually being shaped into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. And thirdly, in 1 Corinthians 3, 11 to 12, Paul says again that everything in that building - and that means everything in your life believer - must be build upon the foundation of Christ Jesus. My question, as I finish, is this: believer, Iron Hall assembly, how's our building going? May God bless His word to our hearts.

Our Father in heaven, we realize that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Lord help us not to be backward, and help us always to look upward, and Lord help us to look forward - that the best is yet to be. And Lord that little verse grips us when it says that the glory of the former house will not be seen in the light of the glory of the latter house. And we think of this house, even here, dear God, the glory that it has had in the past. But Lord we would claim that verse and ask Thee to apply it to us, that the best would be yet. And Lord what you are going to do in this place in the future may far surpass what we thank Thee for doing in the past. We thank Thee Lord that our hope is in God, and we ask that His blessing and His presence, as we've been thinking about, may go with us now and ever more. Amen.

Transcribed by Judith Watkins, Preach The Word - September 2000

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Majoring On The Minors: Haggai - Chapter 3

"Bringing God's Blessing Down"

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Haggai 2:10-19

Date: Ninth month, twenty-fourth day (18th December 520BC)

Message: "From this day I will bless you" (verse 19)

- 1. *You Need To Confess (verses 10-14)***
- 2. *You Need To Be Holy (verses 10-14)***
- 3. *You Need To Examine Self (verses 15-18)***
- 4. *You Need To Be Blessed (verse 19)***

Haggai chapter 2, Haggai 2 and we're beginning to read at verse 10. And remember that in the first study - two studies ago, that we began the book of Haggai - we looked at the first sermon, the first message that Haggai delivered. Last Monday evening we looked at the second message - chapter 2 and verses 1 to 9. You'll remember that I told you last week that his third message and his fourth message, they were both given on the same day.

We're going to look this evening at the third message from verse 10 through to verse 19: "In the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean. And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord: Since those days were, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the pressfat for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty. I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith the Lord. Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? Yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you".

You'll remember that the land of Judah had come out of captivity from the land of Babylon. They'd been seventy years there, they came back to their homeland and Cyrus had given them permission to begin to build their temple, and they started to build the foundations of the temple. But the book of Ezra tells us that the Samaritans discouraged them, they said all manner of evil against them, they sent a letter to the Emperor to try and stop them from doing this great work of God - and they were discouraged from the work of God, like we can be discouraged in our lives because of the things that come in from day to day.

You'll remember that we learnt that, for sixteen years, that whole work of God was hindered because of the saint's discouragements. But you will remember also that we learnt that through the disobedience - and we saw it in the book of Habakkuk - through the disobedience of the children of God, what happened and what had been promised in the book of Deuteronomy, was that the heavens would become brass, the earth would become dust. You see, God has a pattern and God has a way of working with His children, and indeed with His world, that when they do not walk in obedience with Him, He brings famine and He brings drought. This is a story that's found right throughout the word of God, from Genesis even to Revelation - when the world is

hit with pestilence, with plagues, with drought, with famine and there is a lack of water - and what God is saying to all of the world, but to His people especially: when there is a lack of water, it is to show you a spiritual lesson: that there is a lack in your life of the living water of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These people, as we look at them now - we've gone through their history a little bit - and as they receive this third message of Haggai, we see here that they are in the midst of famine and in drought. Now, you'll remember from chapter 1, look back at it, and verse 14 that you saw with me that the leaders of the nation - Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest - both of them had been stirred by the Spirit of God through the message of God's messenger, Haggai. God's Spirit had come into their heart, had blown a breath upon their soul, had set them alight in the depths of their being and they realised that they needed to consider their ways before God - so what did they do? Right away they got the bricks out, they got the mortar and the cement and they began to start again, building the temple of God. They cleared away all the weeds from the foundation and they began to put brick, upon brick, upon brick. But, they had done all that, they - as [far as] they could see - were obeying God, but as they looked around them, as they looked to the clouds, as they looked to the fields, there was still drought in the nation - God didn't seem to be answering their obedience.

Why was it? You see, they expected that the moment that they obeyed God and they started rebuilding the temple, that that very day, that very moment and minute of obedience, that God would begin to work again, that God would bless them, that God would bring the rain and bring the harvest once more - but it didn't come! The blessing was not coming. And you might be here this evening, and you might be in the deepest agony, the deepest pain that your heart could know - you might be going through turmoil, physically, mentally, spiritually - and you feel, at this moment, that you have done everything before God that you can do within your soul - yet God isn't answering!

Why was the blessing not coming? Turn with me for a moment to the book of Zechariah, it's just after the book of Haggai - and you'll note that Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, they all prophesy to the same situation. They are all post-exilic prophets - we remember that we learnt that a post-exilic prophet was a prophet that prophesied after the people came out of captivity. And Zechariah, in chapter 3 and verse 1, he is prophesying to exactly the same generation, verse 1: 'And he showed me' - he sees a vision - 'Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the Lord stood by. And the angel of the Lord protested unto Joshua, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by'. Do you see the picture? Who was Joshua? It's not the old Joshua that we're talking about, from the book of Joshua, now - it's Joshua the high priest of the nation of Judah at this moment of time, in the book of Haggai and the book of Zechariah. And as the prophet sees, from a vision of God, Joshua standing there, he sees Satan beside him - and I believe that Satan is laughing, because from head to foot Joshua is standing in filthy clothes, in raiment that is defiled.

Why had the rain stopped? Why was there no harvest? Why was there no blessing? Sure, they were stirred to the depths of their souls - surely they had God the Holy Spirit speaking to them, they had the word of God from the prophet of God, the message of God - verse 13 of chapter 1 - they had everything, you would think, but the blessing still wasn't coming down. Why? Because sin lieth at the door. What am I talking about? Zechariah, as he saw Joshua from head to toe in filthy garments, that was a picture of the nation's sin. They were so sinful - even though they had been stirred to the depths of the being, their bones were shaken by God

the Holy Spirit in chapter 1 - they still were disobedient to God, they still had sin in their life and, one month before Haggai gave this message that we read this evening, Zechariah prophesied the same thing against them. And Haggai with his 'gospel bullets' from his 'gospel gun', one after another, again and again and again, was giving out this message - and in his third message here, in verse 10 on, on the 24th day of the ninth month, the 18th of December 520BC, he gives this awful message.

I don't know about you, but in the Christian life I find this: whenever I hear the word of God, and perhaps I hear someone preaching the word of God and it grips my soul, and like these children in chapter 1 and verse 14 it stirs my spirit, it makes me feel that I ought to do something - but when I walk away from God's presence I can be so disobedient! Is that not right? Maybe as we have studied these words - and we've heard what these minor prophets have had to say, and we've looked at them week after week - our souls and our spirits, our being, have been stirred by the word of God. But what Haggai's saying here to these people: 'You've heard it, children of Judah, you have been stirred, you have been moved to the depths of your souls - yet you're still disobedient!'. That's why the blessing isn't coming. I find, in my Christian life, I'm a bit like a donkey - I might look like a donkey, but that's not what I'm talking about! You know, when you get a carrot and you hang it on a string and a stick and you put it in front of the donkey and you keep walking with it, the donkey keeps walking after it - that's the way I feel sometimes as a Christian. You see if I knew, if I really knew, that what Paul talks about in the New Testament, what the Lord Jesus Christ exemplified in His life here on earth, if I thought it was impossible it wouldn't bother me as much! But the fact is this: that through the Holy Spirit of God it is possible. And everything He has told us to do - He's not some sadist that tells us to do these things, and watches as we can't do it! But what frustrates me the most is how I know what is mine in Christ, what I can have in Him - yet it frustrates me that I don't have it! The people were asking the question: 'Why is the blessing not coming?'. You might be here this evening, and you could be asking yourself: 'I hear the word of God and I feel the word of God in my own soul, I know the word of God - but the blessing doesn't seem to be in my life! I'm a defeated Christian, when something comes across my path - whether it's sin, whether it's sorrow, whether it's sickness - I fall down under it, I'm defeated!'. The answer that was given here is a fourfold message of how to bring God's blessing down.

Let's look at the first point of Haggai's message that we find in verses 10 to 14. Look at verses 10 to 14: 'In the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts', now here it is, 'Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying...'. Now, in the Old Testament dispensation when you had a question about ritual things and the ceremony of religion, you were to go and ask of the mouth of the priests - that's what the word of God says. So Haggai, he goes because he's got a big question: why God's blessing isn't coming - he goes to the priests, the men that should know, and he asks of their mouth and he says in verse 12: 'If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean'. Now what Haggai was doing here - and what God the Holy Spirit is doing for us at this moment in time - is giving us an awesome object lesson.

You see, Haggai asked two questions concerning the ceremonial law of these priests. You see, what happened when they were about to make a sacrifice, the priest would take holy flesh - and the holy flesh from the beast was simply the best part of the sacrifice - that was the part of the sacrifice that would be offered to God. It was the piece that was set aside especially for God. But what would happen was, the priest would take his robe and he would make like a little apron out of it, and he would put the flesh - this holy flesh - within it. And Haggai was asking the priest, listen: you see if he were to walk into that tabernacle or into the temple, and perhaps that piece of holy flesh would touch another piece of bread, or a piece of meat, or some wine, or some oil - some other food - would that holy flesh make the other food holy? The answer that the priests gave was: 'No'.

That was the first question. Now I want you to turn with me for a moment to Leviticus chapter 6, because here we find the principle, Leviticus chapter 6 and verse 27. You see, the garment that the priest wore, that the holy flesh [was] within, became holy. Verse 27: 'Whatsoever shall touch the flesh thereof shall be holy' - but that did not mean that everything that came into contact with this holy flesh became holy of itself. If it touched other food, if it touched the furniture in the temple or in the tabernacle, did that mean that that holiness was transferred from the holy flesh into whatever was defiled? The priests said it didn't. Then the second question that was given by Haggai to the priests is found in verse 13 - he then talks, not about ritual holiness, but he asks a question about ritual defilement. In other words: can moral uncleanness be transferred and defile something that is holy? In other words: if you're unholy, or if something is unholy, and it comes into contact with something that is awesomely holy, can it defile that thing? The answer, from verse 13, that the priests gave was: 'Yes it can'.

Now let's look at a bit of background, it's important that we understand this this evening. Turn with me to Numbers chapter 19 - now, in the old ceremonial law, we have this law about what is unclean and about what is clean. Numbers chapter 19 and verse 13, there are many things were classed as unclean within the Old Testament, but we're going to look at the one thing that Haggai mentions in verse 13 - which is a dead body. Verse 13: 'Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel: because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet upon him'. Now why did God say this? There are so many obscure rules and principles that are in the Old Testament, especially the first five books of the Bible - they seem unreasonable, it's hard to make them intelligible: why these people were not allowed to touch certain things, eat of certain things - what was it? Turn with me to Leviticus, Leviticus and chapter 10, now here we have, categorically, God telling us why He gave all these rules to the children of Israel about not touching this and being allowed to touch other things. Leviticus 10 verse 10: '[This is all given] that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; and that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses'. Why are they not allowed to eat certain things? Why were they not allowed to touch certain things? Because God was trying to teach them in a spiritual sense, not a physical sense, that there are certain things in this world that are clean and unclean.

The two questions that Haggai asked the priests were simply this - the answers that were given - first of all, to his first question, was that holiness cannot be transferred. The second answer, to the second question, was this: although holiness cannot be transferred, filthiness always, but always, is transferred. Let me give you an illustration: think of science - and you know as well as I do that you could be the fittest person on this planet, you could be so healthy, everything could be going your way, but you cannot transfer your health, can you? But if you have a cold, or if you have a flu or a virus, you know that anybody who comes within a radius of you is in danger of catching it - in the same way health cannot be transferred, germs and disease is transferred; holiness can't be transferred, but the disease of sin, iniquity and transgression and evil filthiness is always transferred. Now, what was Haggai trying to say to these people? He was telling them that sin lay in the camp. He was telling them that - even though they had been stirred by the word of God, even though they had been motivated by it to get up, to get going and to put one stone upon a stone to build the temple - the evil, wicked sinfulness that was in their life was being transferred from their heart, down their arm to the very bricks that they were building for God. Do you get what he was saying? 'Your sinfulness, children of Judah, is being transferred into the work of God!'.

What did we hear some time ago from Psalm 24? 'Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in His holy place?', and the Psalmist is talking about the temple of God, 'Him that hath clean hands, a pure heart'. The book of Proverbs tells us that the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord - what is the application here? What is the message of the Spirit of God to us today? It's this: that holy things cannot

make you holy! And the priest was in his holy garments, he was carrying the holy flesh - and that holy flesh was an offering to God, the best offering that could be given - yet if it came into contact with anything else it couldn't be made holy. Oh, that we would learn this: that carrying our Bible doesn't make us holy; sisters, wearing a headcovering doesn't make your heart holy; praying to God doesn't make us holy; giving alms doesn't make us holy. Saying the words, going to church, where our feet take us, where our mind brings us cannot make us holy, because coming into contact with holy things can never change the heart.

But secondly it tells us that unclean things make us unholy. And although that holiness of the word of God, when we touch it, cannot be transferred into our souls and into our minds - when we touch what is unclean, when we touch what is defiled, oh, it comes into our very souls, into our very hearts, it defiles us! Now Christian, let me say on the strongest terms: if you are touching unclean things, you will be defiled. We cannot, as human beings, touch unclean things - we are like magnets to unclean things, they are transferred to us, they're embedded in our mind, in our soul. And the tragedy of it is this: like the children of Judah, no matter how long we're saved, no matter what we do for God, or say for God, or know about God - if we have defilement, if we have sin in our lives and filthiness somewhere within us, it defiles everything else that we are doing for God! That is the message within this passage.

Turn with me, for a moment, to Romans chapter 6. Now, here we have outlined the law that I have just been talking about - Romans chapter 6 and verse 21. And Paul has just been talking about how the child that is unsaved is a servant to sin, and in verse 21 he says: 'What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death'. What is the fruit of sin? Sin - from the very first day that it came into the universe - sin brought forth death! Do you see the picture? The Jew that touched a dead body is for us as the children of God today, as us - we who touch dead things, who touch sin, who go about with dead people and partake of their dead activities. Do you remember the prodigal son? Oh, he got his inheritance from his father, he went into the far country and he spent it all - and you remember that, when all his friends left him because he had no more inheritance left for them to spend, where was he found? Eating with the pigs - and what are the pigs in scripture? Swine, pork, is the unclean animal - and what that is saying to us here is: he was left unclean because he was touching the dead things. What about the demoniac? Do you remember him? Possessed, cutting himself, bleeding, crying, out of his mind - and the Lord Jesus came to him. But where was he living when He came? It says that he was living in a cemetery with dead people, he was inhabited around by those whom he was like! And then the Lord came and - blessed be His name - as soon as he saw the Lord he ran to His feet, and it says that he worshipped Him. But when the Lord cast the demons out of him, what did they go into? The pigs - and they all ran down, thousands of them, into that water and drowned - dead pigs! A picture of our sin, a picture of the uncleanness that we will have if we as the children of God touch those things that are dead.

Christian, are you touching what's dead? You know what I'm talking about. We live in such a sinful world, don't we? Such a sin-cursed place, that at every hand - you can't go into a newsagents without being hit in the face with sin, you can't turn the television or the radio on, you can't drive in your car without seeing a billboard - it's coming from everywhere, all the sin in this world and it's so hard to walk the narrow way and remain undefiled! What is the Christian to do? Paul tells us - turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 6 and verse 14 - 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers', and here's the rule for the child of God, 'for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you'. Can you see it? The children of Judah, and they're walking around the scaffolding of this temple building, and they're pulling their hair out asking the question, 'Why? We've been stirred, we've heard, we've done what God has told us - why is this happening? Why isn't our work being blessed? Why isn't God's

blessing coming down?'. And the answer comes from the word of God through Haggai, his first point: 'You need to confess'.

You see, the man who uncovers his own sins, God covers them over. And we're so prone, the sinners that we are, to cover our sin and to hide our sin - and when we hide our sin God has to strip our sins away until we become bare. But if you want to know your spiritual temperature, like the Judeans here in this passage, ask yourself: 'What is the time lapse in my life between me sinning and then confessing my sin?'. You see, these Judeans were living with their sin - oh, they were obeying the Lord in many ways, they were following His path, they were doing what He told them - to build the temple of God in the ways that they knew how - but it was easy to get sin out of their heart, it was easy for them to do wrong, but it was so hard for them to get sin out of their mouth, for them to confess it! Do we deceive ourselves? You know, we can, we can do rational and logical somersaults in our minds to legitimise our sin, to tell ourselves that it's alright to do it. We can make all these excuses within ourselves, but at the end of the day God says that it is only obedience that He will bless! And until we, as the children of God, see the seriousness of our awful sinfulness and the sinfulness of sin, we will never confess it! We will never be done with it! We will never bury it! We will never turn our back on it!

How can you see the seriousness of your sin? Turn with me to Numbers chapter 5 for a moment, Numbers chapter 5 and verses 2 and 3 tell us what happened to the unclean person that was in the nation of Judah. Verse 2: 'Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one that hath an issue, and whosoever is defiled by the dead: Both male and female shall ye put out, without the camp shall ye put them; that they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I dwell' - do you see the seriousness of this? To be defiled, to be unclean, to be touched by a dead thing, to be doing what God said not to do meant a break, a severing, a divorce of fellowship between the child of God and his God. Separation! Sin is very serious - and to see how serious it is we need to turn to Hebrews chapter 13, do that with me for a moment. Hebrews chapter 13, verse 11: 'For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp' - what is burned without the camp? The sacrifice for uncleanness, the sacrifice for iniquity, the sin offering, the thing that has touched dead things, those people that have done wrong their offering was burnt outside the camp - look at verse 12: 'Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate'. Do you see how serious our sin is? Our uncleanness, whether saved or unsaved, as the child of God or the child of the devil, do you see how serious it is? That our Lord Jesus Christ, like that beast, had to be despised - He had to be put out of the camp, He had to be rejected of His friends, of His family, of His kindred, of His nation, He had to be pushed out into all separation because of our sin! Do you see it? He was put without the camp, but worse than all that separation, He was separated from His own Father. And He hung there, and because of your sin, and because of my sin, God turned His face from His only Beloved Son - and He cried: 'My God! Why!'. Why? Because of our dead things.

But look secondly, and quickly, he said you need to confess...but you need to be holy. Verse 14 of Haggai chapter 2, and Haggai brought the application of their illustration to them: 'Then [he] answered, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean'. 'You're asking Me, children, why the work isn't blessed, why the harvest hasn't come, why there is drought and there is no rain - it's because your deadness and your touching dead things has been transferred into the work of God!'. You see in Exodus 19, if we had time we could look at, and verse 6, God told His people Israel, when He chose them, that they were a peculiar people, that they were a special people - but they were to be a holy people! If they were to take the name of God they had to be holy. And God was telling His beloved children: 'If you're to have the blessing, if you're wondering why the blessing's not coming, it's because of the lack of holiness' - and generally speaking, God is saying that you must be holy for God to bless you! God doesn't bless unclean hands and an impure heart. 'You must be holy', God says, 'even as I am holy' - and without holiness no man shall see the Lord!

You see, the Holy Ghost doesn't flow through methods, He flows through holy men. God blesses holy men and women - and the gospel moves when holy men and women of God move with it in their holy life that reflects the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Dead men, and dead Christians, and dead preachers give out dead messages and dead salvations - and all they do is kill as they preach - but the man of God that is filled with the Spirit, the woman of God who goes about their daily business sharing the gospel, bringing the good news of the message in the Holy Spirit and filled with the Holy Spirit, brings forth life. If you remember, in the Old Testament, the high priest wore a little platelet of jewels - and do you remember what was inscribed upon it? 'Holiness to the Lord'. He was a priest, he was the high priest, he was ministering to the Lord, he was doing things for the Lord - but we read in 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 5, that we in Christ have become a holy priesthood, a holy nation. And just as Israel were the children of God then, the church is the children of God now - we are the bearers of the name of God, the light in a dark place, the salt in the earth - and we are to have the same title upon us: 'Holiness to the Lord'. Do we have it? Do we have God's holiness?

God tells us, through Paul in 1 Corinthians 6 and verses 19 and 20, that not only is there a temple that was made with hands in the Old Testament, but He tells us that not only are we the priests of God - every single one of us, not just ministers or pastors, but everyone of us is a priest, therefore every one of us ought to be holy - but we also are walking buildings of God Himself, we are the temples of God! He says: 'For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness'. Are you the temple of the Holy Spirit? Are you, as a child of God, blessed with holiness of God? Do you know what it is to be filled with the Holy Spirit? To flee from iniquity? To not touch that thing? To be holy in your life?

Look thirdly at his message in verses 15 to 18, for he tells them there not just to confess their sin, not just to be holy, but he tells them that they need to examine themselves. Do you remember the message that came, not just once, twice, three times in this passage that we read? We've heard it already - what was his great clarion call? 'Consider yourself! Consider yourself! Consider your ways before God!' - and again, in verse 14, he calls them 'this people', not His own people. He says you're going to have to consider yourself, self-examine yourself - verse 15 - and if you do, this day and upward I will bless you. What He was meaning was this: for sixteen years, before a stone had ever been put on another stone, after that point when they had been discouraged and they stopped the work of God, no blessing came, no rain came, no harvest came - and year after year they came to harvest the wheat, and they were expecting 20 measures but they only got 10, 50% of a loss. They came back again looking for the wine vats, they looked for 50 vessels and they only got 20 and he asks them this question: 'Consider why this is happening children, consider why there is a low harvest' - and in verse 19 He says this, after telling them to consider three times: 'Is the seed yet in the barn?'. You've heard the word of God, you've prayed about the word of God, you've taken the exhortation, you may even have started acting on the word of God - but, Judeans, if there is sin in your life there will be no seed in the barn.

Do you want to be a fruitful Christian? Do you want to be a Christian with joy in your step, with blessing in your soul and in your heart and in your life? Do we want to be a church that God blesses with the growth of Christians, with Christian love in our hearts for one another, with a place where souls will be born? If we are, we must be done with sin! Because we must be blessed. And Haggai, at the end of this message, after asking 'What's the harvest like?', he says this: 'From this day I will bless you'. Since the 21st of September 520BC they had heard the word of God, the first message, and in chapter 1 verse 14 they were stirred about it; and then in the second message they began to work about it. But God, as he told Amos in chapter 4 of his little book, He said unto them again, and again, and again: 'Ye have not turned onto Me!. 'Rend your hearts and not your garments', He is saying - it's OK to have the words, to have the walk and to have the talk, but you must forsake your sin - why did Amos say it? Verse 19: 'Prepare to meet thy God' - you see, there is a day when all of us as believers will stand before our Lord Jesus Christ and we will look into His glorified face, and the word of God says this: that we will 'suffer loss' if we have not given all.

The blessing that I receive from this verse is this: that on this date, the 18th of December when this message was given 520BC, there was a watershed in the Judeans life. They realised it's not enough to be stirred by the word of God, it's not enough to talk about the word of God and to bless by the word of God, it's not even enough to obey the word of God if we haven't got the sin out of our lives. And at that moment in time, despite their sin - despite their sin! - God cleansed them because they confessed to Him, and when they uncovered their sin, God covered their sin and God told them: 'From this moment in time I will start to bless you!'. Oh, there is blessing, there is so much blessing for the child of God that hears the word of God, the child of God that is stirred by the word of God, the child of God that obeys the word of God - but oh, more than all that, finishing off, we need to realise that there is blessing that comes down from God for the child of God that forsakes their sin! What did Wesley say? He said: 'Give me a hundred men that fear nothing but God and sin, and I'll turn the world upside-down'.

What does God say to our hearts today? He said what He said to the prophet Malachi: 'Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house...prove me now', test me here, 'saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room to receive it'!

'Where is the blessedness I knew,
When first I saw Lord?
Where is that soul-refreshing view,
Of Jesus and His love?

Return, oh Heavenly Dove, return,
Sweet Messenger of rest.
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,
And drove Thee from my breast'.

Our Father, we remember that the prophet Isaiah told us that, when the Lord Jesus would come, that there would be a highway of holiness. Lord, forgive us when we do not walk on that path and help us to confess our sins - for He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And help us to be holy, even as Thou art holy, and help us continually to examine ourselves and then - oh, when we're rid of sin in our lives - then God's blessing comes down. May it be said of us in this place, in the light of Thy truth, 'From this day I will bless thee'. We pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - November 2000

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Majoring On The Minors: Haggai - Chapter 4

"His Day Will Come"

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Haggai 2:20-23

Date: Ninth month, twenty-fourth day (18th December 520BC)

Message: "In that day I will make thee" (verse 23)

1. *The Shaking Of The Earth (verse 21)*
2. *The Smashing Of Man's Kingdoms (verse 22)*
3. *The Servant Of Jehovah (verse 23)*
4. *The Signet Of God's Choosing (verse 23)*

Haggai chapter 2, Haggai chapter 2 - and while you're turning to that passage of Scripture don't forget, you may have seen it on the way in, there's a book stall at the back of the hall, and we're not only near Christmas but we're near the New Year, and it's a custom for many people to begin their Bible readings at the start of a New Year. Now, I'm not saying you have to do that, but a lot of people do it - they find that it's helpful, it's very practical. And what's a good practice is reading the word of God through once in the year - now you don't have to do that if you don't feel that you're capable of doing that. There're some books at the back of the hall and they're for all our abilities: some of them are going through the Bible in a year, the whole Bible; some of them are going through the New Testament; some of them are simply going through one book, or the book of Psalms. There's even those for the boys and girls at the back, daily readings for them that they can do day by day. It's important that no matter how much you read, or how much you pray, that at least once during the day that you do it. So we've bought some of these books for you to look at, and if you want to order some of them please write your name and the quantity of them on the sheet at the door, and we'll be glad to help you.

Haggai chapter 2 and this is our last study in the book of Haggai, and we're beginning at verse 20 of chapter 2. You'll remember that the book of Haggai is split into four sermons or messages that Haggai presented to the nation of Judah as they came out of 70 years captivity in the land of Babylon. We studied the book of Habakkuk - we saw there how God was prophesying that they were about to go into the land of Babylon for those 70 years. But as we see them here in Haggai, Judah has come out of the other end - and here they are and Cyrus has told them that they're allowed now to rebuild their temple, but through discouragements and so forth they stop it. Then, when they're allowed to do it again by Darius the first, they don't have the motivation - and you remember that we looked over the past weeks at the reasons why they were so discouraged in the work of God.

This is the fourth message that we're going to look at today, the fourth sermon that Haggai delivers to the nation of Judah. Verse 20: "And again the word of the Lord came unto Haggai in the four and twentieth day of the month, saying", and you'll note that that is the same day as the last sermon that we studied, last Monday evening. So the last two messages in this book of Haggai are presented on the same day: "Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I will shake the heavens and the earth; And I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother. In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the Lord, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts".

Verse 20 tells us that it was the same day on which he had delivered his previous message that he was now delivering his fourth message, it's still the 18th of December 520BC - a bit near today's date. And the Lord speaks, and if you look at verse 20 it says that the Lord spoke again on that day. In other words, Lord had already spoken to Judah on this date, it must have been a great situation for the children of God to be there when God's prophet was bringing God's message by God's messenger - it must have been an awful thing, mustn't it? But to have it twice on the one day, where God was coming in by His Spirit, through His messenger, bringing His message - and twice on the same day was telling these people of Judah what to do. Do you know that God can speak more than once in day? I wonder have you been spoken to by God today where you are, where you sit? Have you been around God's word? Have you been in the place of prayer? Have you been seeking His face? Have you been in communion with Him? Is your face glowing, like Moses, because you've been in the presence of God and God has spoken to you?

If you've been reading the word of God today, you must have been sure that God has been speaking to you. But I wonder, over the past weeks and even months, from September that we've begun these studies in the minor prophets, and as we have majored in on them, the book of Habakkuk, the book of Haggai - small books, three chapters and two chapters long, we've only looked at five chapters - but as we've looked into the depths and the gems and the mines of the word of God and the challenge, I wonder has God been speaking to you? Could it be that week after week God has been speaking, God has been unveiling things, God has been convicting things in your life - perhaps God has been encouraging in places where you have been discouraged or downtrodden? But no matter what it is - an exhortation, an encouragement, or a rebuke - God has been speaking! My question is this: does God need to speak again?

You see God needed to speak again, a second time on the same day, to these people. And we learnt last week that it was alright for these Judeans to hear the word of God, we saw from chapter 1 and verse 14, if you look at it, that they didn't just hear or read the word of God - but it says that their bones were stirred by the word of God! They were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they were motivated by the Holy Spirit, to put a brick upon a brick on the foundation of the temple and to begin rebuilding, to start the work of God again. But we saw last week, didn't we, that that wasn't enough. Why was it not enough? They were stirred by the word of God, and we could have been stirred by the word of God. They maybe realised their state before God, as they did, and it made them fear - they began to do the things that they weren't doing, and maybe that's what you have been doing in the past weeks as God has pinpointed, put His finger right on the red spot in your life - maybe you have decided: 'I'm going to have to do something about this!'. They looked to the sky, didn't they? And there was no rain. They looked to the ground, didn't they? But there was no crops. And no matter how much they obeyed the word of God, or were moved by the word of God, nothing was happening! And God had to come in, nearly at the end of this letter by Haggai, and say this: 'The reason why nothing is happening is because you haven't confessed your sin'.

Now, here we are again, and the second time on the same day God is coming - and you notice in verse 20 and verse 21 that God's message is now not delivered to the whole nation of Judah. Look at verse 21, God says: 'Speak to Zerubbabel'. Now, who was Zerubbabel? If you remember, we noted that in verse 14 of chapter 1 that both Zerubbabel and Joshua were stirred by the word of God. Joshua was the head of their religious, ecclesiastical system in Judah - he was the high priest - but Zerubbabel was the civil, political leader within the nation. Therefore in verse 21 we see that this fourth message was directed specifically to Zerubbabel - why? Zerubbabel needed encouragement, he needed special encouragement from the Lord. And you know, sometimes we preach the word of God, or sometimes we read the Bible and we read it in a general way - in other words, we read this little book of Haggai as being to the Judeans, then we go on to the gospel of Matthew and read it as being to the Jews, Mark to the Greeks and so on, the book of Romans to the Romans, Corinthians to the Corinthians - but there are times in our lives when we need to come to the word of God and we need to see it as God's word to us! Do you know that? What does the children's chorus say? 'Every promise in the book is mine. Every letter, every word, every line' - it's all for me, the word of God!

And when you're in need, and if you're in need this evening, more than ever: get into the word of God, for everything in it's for you!

Zerubbabel was so discouraged, he was so downhearted - as many of the leaders within the work of God are, and you know and I know that Satan often attacks the leaders of God's people to get at the rest of them. That's why, in the book of 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 25, the great apostle turned - remember who he was, perhaps the greatest Christian that ever lived - and he turned to these believers, half his spiritual stature, and he said: 'Brethren, pray for us!'. Do you pray for me? I thank those that pray for me because I feel the benefit of it. Do you pray for the oversight and the deacons? Do you pray for the Sunday School teachers, those that go round the doors, the choirs, everything - even the musicians - do you pray for the people that are in the work of God? Because the people that are on the front line are the first to be hit!

I don't know what the circumstances for Zerubbabel were like, but I tend to speculate that perhaps, where Zerubbabel was at this moment, he saw around him this - here was the little nation of Judah, just come out of captivity, absolutely discouraged, absolutely drained of all political, religious worth and strength - and he's standing there looking around at it, and all the nations and the empires, the Medo-Persian Empire, the rising empires, the great nations that were built like a wall around Judah - and perhaps as he saw all this, although he was in his emancipation and his freedom, perhaps he was beginning to despair and feared for the future remnant of the Jews, the people of God. What was going to happen to them? They had been downtrodden for 70 years in Babylon, they'd got out, they were given permission to build the temple - they were discouraged by the Samaritans, it was put off for 16 years - then they were given permission again, but they were so downtrodden and the stuffing was knocked out of them that they couldn't lay a finger on that temple. And Zerubbabel's standing there, the head of this motley crew, looking around at them, looking around at those that are pressing against him from the other nations - and he looks to heaven, and perhaps he despairs at the circumstances around him!

Circumstances have the tendency to discourage, don't they? I don't know where you are, but the Holy Ghost knows where you are - and your circumstance at this moment of time, like Zerubbabel, is despairing. You don't know where to turn to, those that are nearest and dearest to you, like those for Zerubbabel, the Judeans, were past themselves. Your enemies are against you, everything is against you, the heaven is brass, the ground is dust, there is nowhere to turn to - it is desperate! This can be the case, especially when you're trying to build God's work. What do you need when that happens? Do you know what you need? Do you know what you need? You need what God gave Zerubbabel in His fourth message, you need encouraged! And God came beside Zerubbabel and He brought this great message to encourage the governor's faith by the faith of God - why? Because unbelief always stops and robs us of God's blessing! Have you got that?

You see, if Zerubbabel was to be blessed he had to be encouraged to get out of unbelief. It was no good battering him with a rod and telling him to believe, he had to be encouraged to believe! And when you're in the midst of despair, and maybe in the midst of sin, or discouragement, or failure, or bereavement or whatever it may be - and everything seems to be falling around you - it's no good beating you, it's better to encourage you, through the word of God, to have faith in God! I wonder, in this Christian age that we live in, are we unbelieving believers? Are we? Do you know what unbelief is? Unbelief doubts God's word, in fact unbelief calls God a liar. And worse than calling God a liar, it actually makes Him perjurous, it identifies God as a perjurer - because not only are you saying that His word is not believable, but His very oath is not believable.

What is faith? Faith unlocks the divine storehouse of God. Faith breaks us into the cheque book of all God's riches in the word of God - but unbelief is what bars it from every child of God. Someone has said that the church has halted somewhere between Calvary and Pentecost. Is that true? Remember the church, an embryo, as they were discouraged after the crucifixion, and the Lord Jesus Christ was in the grave - you

remember that? Have we got stuck somewhere there in discouragement, in failure, in unbelief - and we haven't walked in, like the Hebrews, into the land of Canaan and promise, where the Spirit of God, in all His blessing, falls and ignites? Are we unbelieving believers?

Now we need to make a distinction here this evening, because there is natural faith and there is spiritual, or supernatural faith. You see, most men and women have natural faith. Sometimes when you hear some illustrations in gospel preaching about faith, it's no more faith - God's faith - than flying in the air! You see there is natural faith, that's the faith that you have in your pew, that it doesn't cave in and that you fall in. That's the faith that men have had when they've had a vision of the telephone, or electricity, or the plane, or whatever it may be - and they followed their vision, they had faith in their vision and they accomplished it: that's natural faith. But this, this faith that the word of God speaks of is spiritual, supernatural faith. It is nothing to do with man, it is a gift given by God, because man in his sinful state cannot muster it up. It's something that gets, not just into your intellect and your mind, but it gets into your will, it sets into your heart and it holds onto your affections. This is something that sets you on fire. This is something that is buried deep within your being as a spiritual entity. This is something that you cannot define - it is something that God gives by His Spirit!

God loves to be trusted, do you know that? God just wants to be trusted. You remember that we ended last Monday evening in that verse in Malachi: 'Prove me now saith the Lord'. Now that's from a position of faith, it's not some sceptic or atheist coming along and saying: 'Right, I'm going to see if there is a real God here!' - that's not what He's saying, He's talking to believers, wanting to be proven that He is a God who He says He is, that His word is true, that His promises are watertight! Do we prove God? The Lord Jesus Christ hated unbelief. Do you remember the occasion of Jairus' daughter? A brother was illustrating to me not so long ago how that man came, wanting his daughter to be healed. He knew that she was dying and he came to the Lord Jesus, and you remember that the Lord Jesus Christ went to heal the woman with the issue of blood. And in the interim, when He was away doing that, the little girl passed away into eternity. And as that man, that father, with the tears running down his face was imploring Christ that He would come and, as far as he was concerned, Christ wasn't a bit interested! Someone came up to him and tapped him on the shoulder and said: 'Trouble the Master no more, the girl's dead'. And the Lord went with that man to that house, and you remember the scene - what happened was that: they walked in and the Lord Jesus Christ, who is, and was, and always shall be the author of life stood and said: 'She sleepeth'. What did they do? They were standing around and they were laughing, they were laughing, they were scorning Him: 'Who does He think He is? Saying that that little child is [sleeping] - does He not know what a dead body is?'. What did He do? It says He put them out, He put them out! Why? Because Christ puts out unbelief!

Has the Lord Jesus Christ put out unbelief in your life? Do you know what discourages me more than anything? Christians who will not believe the word of God, and an unbelief within me of the word of God. You see people that pour cold water - you know when you're on a mountain top and you're rejoicing in the Lord, and you've got a promise or something, and the Lord's blessing - and they come along and they say: 'Well, don't get too fanatical you know!'. And they burst your bubble, and you could burst their nose! You know what it's like - unbelief! People who will not believe God, and because they can't believe God they don't want anybody else believing God!

'Oh, for a faith that will not shrink,
Though pressed by many a foe.
That will not tremble on the brink
Of poverty or woe'.

We've heard it over and over again, from Habakkuk, from Haggai: without faith it is impossible to please God! If you want to follow our God you need faith. If you want to please our God and you don't have faith,

well, you're going to have to please another God because our God is the God who has to be pleased by faith! And if you're child of God this must be, I believe, one of the most liberating experiences in the life of the child of God: to realise that our God can be trusted! To realise that the promises of God are for you and me, and I can live experientially in the light of their reality! Has that light ever dawned on your life?

I read the story today - I love reading Leonard Ravenhill, and I would recommend his books to you, but his father was a man who was not a great preacher or anything like that but he realised his ministry for God, and he went to the hospitals day by day and was an evangelist just around the hospitals talking to men and women, some were dying, some were ill, boys and girls, about the Saviour. He led hundreds to Christ through that ministry. He was especially good at witnessing to Roman Catholics because he was a Roman Catholic before the Lord saved him. One day he was talking to a man and the man turned round to him, and the man objected and said: 'I've prayed to God and God didn't hear me!'. And Ravenhill's father turned to him and said: 'Now, look, if the King of England were to come into this room right now and I was to sit on this bed, and I was to ask him for a five pound note. Because I'm a subject of this nation, do you think he would give it to me?'. The man said: 'Well, I don't think he'd give it to you'. And then Ravenhill's father went on to say: 'Well, what about if the Prince of Wales came into this little room and asked for a five pound note from the King?'. He said: 'Of course, he would give it to him, for that's his father - he's his son!'. Ravenhill turned to that man and said: 'Yes, that's it isn't it? It's all to do with relationship'. Child of God today, whatever you're going through, whatever you feel your deficiency is in Christ or your spiritual life - whatever it is, realise the wealth that you have in Christ, the unlimited access to unlimited wealth that we have in the Lord Jesus! We have everything, for we have Christ. It's not like Old Mother Hubbard and there's nothing in the cupboard, but there's a cupboard there and all it takes is the arm of faith to reach up. That's what the book of Hebrews is about: reaching up to the cupboard and opening up and taking by faith and boldness what is our right in Christ.

This was Haggai's message to Zerubbabel: 'Have faith in your God!'. Because one: He is going to shake the earth, verse 21. The first point: He will shake the earth. What was Zerubbabel worried about? He was worried about his enemies, he was worried about everything going wrong again - sure they were only out of captivity! And maybe you're here and you're a compulsive worrier, and you're only out of the valley - you're only out of captivity - and you're worrying about the next one that hasn't come along yet. He's standing there and God says: 'Look, have faith in Me, because I'm going to shake the earth', look at verse 20, 'I will shake the heavens and the earth...I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms...I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen'. God was telling this man, encouraging Zerubbabel: 'Don't be afraid, one of these days I'm going to bring an earthquake on the earth' - and what that's speaking of is a divine judgement that was ordained of God that one day will come and will be poured on all the nations, and they will suffer - as verse 22 says - the overflow of God's anger. Can you visualise it? The Bible talks about a cup of iniquity, it talks about the cup of the wrath of God and it's being filled up by the sins of men. And I believe today, where we are at this moment, perhaps in your personal life, men sinning against you, inflicting, opposing you - it's filling up by the second, and one day when it's full to overflowing, God's wrath will overflow the cup and hit the enemy. What must that have meant for Zerubbabel?

And God's alluding in verse 21, I believe, to Sodom and Gomorrah, saying: 'I will shake the heavens and the earth; And I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen'. Turn with me to Genesis chapter 19, and we see here the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and we can't go into it in too much detail, but you know what happened: they were defiling themselves, men with men. But you know, that was not the primary sin of Sodom - if you search the word of God you'll find out that the primary sin was pride. But if you look at chapter 19 and verse 23 and 24 you see that: 'The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven' - why did He do that? 'Sure, that's an impatient God, isn't it?', that's what the world says, 'That's some God that would send people into such a thing as that. What kind

of a God is that, a God of love?'. Look at chapter 18 and verse 20: 'And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous' - God was punishing their sin! Their cup of iniquity, His cup of wrath, was overflowing! It's like today, isn't it? It's overflowing and it's not going to be long until God's going to come in. And God's going to shake the earth - as verse 22 says, of Haggai 2 - in a way that He has never ever done before, and God help anyone who's left down here to face it!

Do you know what that tells me? Sin either ends up on the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary, or you'll have to pay for it in hell. Do you understand that? Christ either bears your sin away on the cross, you have faith in His cross, and you'll never face hell - but sin has to be dealt with, one way or another. Friend this evening, how has your sin been dealt with? Are you sure that your sin has been nailed to Christ on the cross? Are you positive? Because if you're not 100% sure, I'm almost sure that you will pay for that in hell!

In verse 22 I think Haggai is alluding, not this time to Sodom and Gomorrah, but he's talking about the exodus from Egypt: 'And I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen', here it is here, 'and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them' - you remember? Do you remember? That those people - they were armed to the teeth, God's people hadn't a weapon, but they had their God! They were coming out of Egypt and they stood - and maybe it's like you this evening - they're standing at the Red Sea and you can't go forward; you turn around and the armies of Egypt are behind you, you can't go back; you can't go right, you can't go left, you can't go up, you can't go down - and it seems impossible! But God says: 'My child, I will make a way for you'. And God came - do you know what it says? - that: '...there remained', Exodus 14, 'not so much as one of them left'. God shook the earth, and He's going to shake it again.

But secondly, there was the smashing of the kingdoms that we read about in verse 22. After we read about the overthrow of the kingdoms of Sodom and Gomorrah, and then we look at the chariots that were overthrown and those that rode in them: '...and their riders shall come down', every one will be destroyed that means, 'by the sword of his brother'. Do you know what God did in the Old Testament times? God is a supernatural God - now here's a lesson: the people in the armies of Judah and Israel, they didn't stand back at the sidelines and ask God to come in and defeat the enemy. They had to lift up their sword, they had to lift up their armour and their shield, they had to start to run, they had to flex their muscles, they had to breathe and fight, they had to be energetic, they had to put everything that they had into the battle! But at the same time they trusted the Lord, and they had a supernatural Lord. And that's what we've got to do today, we can't sit back in our circumstances, or in the Lord's work, and hope that the Lord's just going to come in and make everything alright right away, supernaturally, if we are not prepared to do what we can do!

In the Old Testament God used to come into the battles, do you know what He used to do? He used to confound the enemy, He confused the enemies - so much so that we read about it in verse 22, at the end of the verse, that each brother - the enemy - actually turned on themselves their swords and killed one another! And the Judeans, the Israelis, had the victory...not by their own hand, but by God's hand. Friends this evening, if we're going to have the victory in the work of God, or the victory of faith in our lives, it'll not be by our own hand. And I've learned more than ever, even today looking into the word of God and being before God, can I share personally that God has been reminding me that: 'You'll never do anything by your hand'. You've got to put everything that you've got into it, but at the end of the day it will be God that will be bringing the victory - isn't that right? That's what the word of God teaches.

Now, look at this: there's a day coming - and the word of God testifies, you can read about it in Ezekiel - that this will happen again, and just like in the story of Gideon when the Midianites were confounded - you can read about it in Judges 7 - and they turned one another to another and killed each other, that will happen in the future! When the nations are surrounding Israel, God will come and confound them - but let me say personally to you this evening: what are the enemies in your life? Is it sin? Is it illness? Is it poverty? Is it discouragement? Is it sorrow? Whatever it may be, they are all our enemies, some of them we've brought

upon ourselves, some of them we could never have brought upon ourselves! But no matter what they are, the secret is this: if we surrender our all to God in the battle, He'll have the victory! Do you believe that? Because if you don't believe it, you'll never have the victory. You've got to believe it!

You know, there's a day coming - and we read about it in Daniel chapter 2, you can turn with me if you wish, Daniel chapter 2 and verse 44, and it tells us on a wider scale that God's going to smash man's kingdoms. Daniel 2 and verse 44: 'And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever!' Imagine that! Statistics tell us that the average nation in our history of our world has only lasted for 250 to 300 years. But this kingdom - the Lord Jesus Christ is going to be the rock cut out of that great gulf, and He's going to be thrown at the kingdoms of the world and smash them - He's going to have the victory! He will establish His kingdom, and of His kingdom and His government and His rule there shall be no end!

Do we not read about it in Psalm 2? Of course we do, turn with me to Psalm 2 quickly, we read about it here in verse 1: 'Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh' - hallelujah! They're all laughing today, but He will laugh! 'The Lord shall have them in derision' - He'll put them into confusion - 'Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession'. Boy, there's a day coming when every knee will bow - no matter what religion, or what filthy god they bow down to - they're going to bow down to my Lord. They're going to worship Him, but it's too late for them to be saved - but their tongue will confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father! And Jesus shall reign where'er the sun doth it's successive journeys run, and His kingdom will stretch from shore to shore 'til moons shall wax and wane no more.

In the French Revolution, there were three revolutions, there were three republics - and of course Republicans don't like to have royalty, and there's the Royalists and there's the Republicans in every country. And the Royalists were absolutely discouraged at the fact that this third republic, the republic that there is now in France, had come to pass. They wrote in the local newspaper and at the end of their whole article they went into all the intricacies of whether it was better to have a monarch or better to have a president - and this was their deciding factor, they said this: 'The King's absence has been cruelly felt'. It's true, isn't it? The absence of the King of kings is felt now, it's felt in a world that is full of birth pangs and is ready to give birth to the wrath of God. It's in your life, you can feel the absence of Christ, although you have Him by His Spirit in your spirit. But there is a day coming when He will reign!

But thirdly, to encourage Zerubbabel - and I'm gradually seeing what my message is maybe going to be next week, because I'm not going to get through this! But the third message that was given by Haggai was that He had provided a servant, the servant of Jehovah. Look at verse 23: 'In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the Lord, and will make thee as a signet', or a signet ring, 'for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts'. Now notice it says: 'this day' - does it say 'this day'? It says: 'that day'. Now what the Holy Spirit is speaking of here is a future day, God is telling them of a time to come - it didn't happen in their history, it didn't happen in the immediate history - it was a future day that the Bible tells of, that all the prophets speak of, a day when Christ would reign with His royal authority upon the earth. Now the question is this: why does God address Zerubbabel? And why, indeed, does God refer to Zerubbabel, if it's got nothing to do specifically with Zerubbabel - because he would have died before any of this would have come to pass? So how could God be saying to [him]: 'I'll take you, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the Lord, and make thee a signet'?

Now we need to understand this, and this is important that we do understand. I want you to notice that throughout this whole book, if you look at chapter 1 and verse 1, you see that the first instance that we find Zerubbabel we see that the message came on '...the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah'. What's he called there? 'Governor of Judah'. Go to verse 14, you remember that they're all stirred, they're all moved by the word of God, what's he called there? 'Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah'. Chapter 2 and verse 2, again: 'Governor of Judah'. Chapter 2 verse 21 that we've already read: 'Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah'. Now, what's he called in verse 25? 'Zerubbabel, my servant' - why the change? If you look throughout the Old Testament you find this: God says 'My servant David' - have you noticed that? And then He says 'My servant Israel', not the person but the nation, 'My servant Israel'. But turn with me for a moment to Isaiah 52 - and I know we're turning to a lot of passages here, but this is a Bible study and we have to learn where these things come from. Isaiah 52 and verse 13, look at this: 'Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider'.

You know, anyone that's called the servant of God within the word of God is a type, is a picture, of the Messiah of God. The Christ of God is the servant of God, look at the whole book of Isaiah! The suffering servant, the suffering Christ - our Saviour and Lord! What does he say? 'Zerubbabel my servant'. You might say: 'Now, David hold on a minute! That's a bit far-fetched, are you trying to say that the Lord is talking about the Lord Jesus Christ? If there was a Jew in the meeting maybe you wouldn't get away with that!'. Turn with me for a moment to Matthew chapter 1 - there is the Jew in the meeting, but I hope I will get away with it! But Matthew chapter 1, and we have the genealogy here of the Lord Jesus Christ, Matthew chapter 1 - now look at this, verse 12. Now you must note: Elijah is called, in the New Testament in the Authorised Version, 'Elias', because that is the Greek trans-literation, it's taken directly from the Greek - it's not spelt the way Elijah is in the Old Testament but it's the same person, it means 'Elijah'. And here, in Matthew chapter 1 and verse 12, it's talking about where the Lord Jesus Christ, humanly speaking came from by the flesh: 'And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel', now that looks a bit familiar, 'and Salathiel begat Zorobabel' - Zerubbabel! - 'And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor' - what is it? Now look at Haggai again, Haggai [chapter 2] verse 23: 'In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant' - not Zerubbabel the governor, but Zerubbabel my servant - 'the son of Shealtiel, saith the Lord'.

What the Holy Spirit is getting at in this verse is not a personal fulfilment by Zerubbabel, but a positional fulfilment in his line, his lineage. Zerubbabel was the son of David, not a direct son but he was in the line of David, and you know as well as I do that Messiah came in the line of David. Therefore Messiah came in the line of Zerubbabel, and God is saying here: 'Look O Judah! One day I'm going to bring out of Zerubbabel's loins, humanly speaking, the Lord Jesus Christ, Messiah, the Son of God, the Deliverer, My suffering Servant! Hallelujah! It's all beautiful, isn't it? All the word of God fitting together, it's beautiful. If you look at Luke chapter 1, and we'll be reading it at Christmas, Luke chapter 1 and then verse 32, verse 31 says: 'And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end'.

I wonder could we go on just for a few moments? The fourth message was perhaps the most beautiful, the signet of God's choosing in verse 23 of Haggai, God says: 'I will take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the Lord, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord'. Now, what was a signet? It's a signet ring, if you look into the Old Testament you find that it was used in three

ways, first of all it was used as a personal signature of a person, a stamp for their name. Then, secondly you find it was something that was used in the palace and in the courts to validate royal authority within a sealed document. And then thirdly, it was used as a guarantee to fulfil a future promise that had been written. But here's the key: the signet always represented the owner - have you got it? Who's talking about a signet here? God. And God saying: 'I'm going to make you Zerubbabel' - not 'you' Zerubbabel, but your seed, 'My servant's going to be My signet! He's going to be My personal stamp, the express image of My person, He's going to seal everything I say - everything in Him is Yea and Amen!' Hallelujah! Princes would sign their edict and stamp it, grant commissions with their signet - but Christ, the Son of God, in His own indelible ink of His own blood signed the great charter of eternal salvation and the Gospel! And everything's secured in that signet, isn't it?

Every man that was given authority or responsibility, they messed it up - you know that? There was Noah, found grace in the eyes of the Lord, he got on the Ark and as soon as he got off it he got drunk. David, a man after God's own heart, found in a bed with a married woman and then murdered her husband. Adam, our father in the beginning, what did he do? He was made responsible over the whole universe, but he couldn't take it! You know, if we had time I'd love to go into this, but Jeremiah 22 and verse 24 - we find there a man who was the ancestor, in fact the grandfather of Zerubbabel. Look at it when you get home - he went into captivity in Babylon because of his own sinfulness, but out of the same seed and from the same generation Zerubbabel, whose name means 'seed of Babylon', was coming out in salvation! And we were damned, all of us, in Adam - we were on our way to hell in Adam - but the last Adam has come: Christ! And He's saved us out of it.

Praise His holy name. And He says: 'I have chosen you' - and believer today, God has chosen you saith the Lord of hosts. This is what is so beautiful: 'Jehovah-Tsabbaoth', the Lord of hosts - that means the Lord of warriors, it's mentioned 14 times in this little book, telling us - telling you in your problem, in your sin, downcast - telling you: God is a warrior that will fight for you! God will deliver you, God will save you. Winston Churchill said the one thing we have learned from history is that we don't learn from history - isn't that right? I hope that in these past weeks that we have learnt from the history of the children of God, and that we have learnt this one fact - listen: if you give your all to Christ, He will give all that He has to you.

Our Father in heaven, we look around the world and even in our lives and we see that the imprint of the god of this world is all over it. But Lord, we as Thy children look forward to a day when the imprint of the signet of Jehovah-Tsabbaoth will be imprinted for all to see. But Lord, imprint it upon our lives so that they may see it before it's too late. Lord, breathe Thy holy fire into our hearts, whatever our need may be today, and most of all: Lord, nearer, draw us nearer to Thyself. For Christ's sake, Amen.

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