

THE BIBLE

in a nutshell

Haggai



"And I will shake all nations and they shall come to The Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this Temple with glory,' says the Lord of Hosts." Haggai 2:7

—by Dr Peter Hammond

Who was Haggai?

Haggai is mentioned in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14 in conjunction with the prophet Zachariah. Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi are the last of the prophetic books. They are the post-exilic prophets. Of the sixteen prophets, eleven prophesied before the Exile, two prophesied during the exile and three prophesied after the exile. Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi ministered in the same time period as Ezra, Nehemiah and Queen Esther. Haggai was the first prophetic voice to be heard after the Exile to Babylon. The name Haggai means "festal one". It is suggested that Haggai was born on a feast day. As Haggai referred to the glory of the first Temple (2:3), he may have been alive to see the first Temple before it was destroyed. In that case he would have been an old man in his eighties.

The Persian king, Cyrus, conquered Babylon in 538BC. He permitted the displaced people to return to their homelands, provided that they build a temple in which they would pray to their God on his behalf. 50 000 Judean exiles responded and seized this opportunity to return to Judea. They were led by Zerubbabel (seed of Babylon) and Joshua, the High Priest.

Zerubbabel had been born in exile and had never seen the Promised Land. He was a surviving member of the royal line of King

The immensity of the task before the returned exiles overwhelmed them and, discouraged, their hearts sank. After two years of building, they stopped, and for fifteen years there was no further progress on the building of the Temple.

Failure to survive

The economy in Judah suffered severe recessions. Food became scarce and expensive, inflation spiralled, droughts and disease reduced their herds and crops, their savings evapo-

The prophet Haggai was commissioned by the Lord to command the people of Jerusalem to repent of their sins, rebuild the House of the Lord and reform their lives.

David. Zerubbabel was the grandson to the last king of Judah, Jehoiachin. The name Joshua means "God our Saviour". Zerubbabel became governor in Judea and Joshua became the High Priest. Most of the Judean exiles chose to remain in Babylon where many had prospered as merchants and moneychangers.

After retracing the route that Abraham took from his home town, Ur, up the river from Babylon, their first action on returning to the Promised Land was to raise an altar and give a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God.

Overwhelming obstacles

The exiles who returned to the land faced a difficult struggle. The land had not been cultivated for 70 years. Jerusalem was a city in ruins, with no walls of protection. The task before them of re-cultivating the land, rebuilding their homes and restoring the Temple, was daunting. There were so few of them and they had little in the way of resources. They also faced opposition from the Samaritans and Edomites.

rated. Having returned from exile in Babylon with high hopes of rebuilding their nation, they floundered and struggled to survive. With the work on the Temple lying unfinished for 15 years, each person became involved in just building his own home.

A call to action

The prophets Haggai and Zachariah were commissioned by the Lord to command the people to repent, to rebuild the Temple, and to reform their lives. In five messages from the Lord, Haggai exhorted the people to return to the Lord, to repent of their sins, to renew their efforts to rebuild the House of the Lord. He commanded them to reform their lives and restructure their priorities in the light of eternity.

Everything has consequences

The droughts, crop failures and economic hardships being suffered by the people of Judah were a direct result of their misplaced priorities. National adversity is due to national



Do not settle for less than God's best

God's people were satisfied with mediocrity. They were guilty of misplaced priorities. They had enough time to build nice houses for themselves and even to panel them at a time when wood was scarce and expensive. But while their houses were being decorated, God's House was devastated.

The people claimed that it was not the right time to build the Temple. We can either make a plan or we can make an excuse. We make time for that which we think is most important. The best indicator of our priorities is what we spend our time, talents and treasure on. True love is measured by sacrifice. We can see how important something is to us by how much time, energy, effort and investment we place into it.



the former" Haggai 2:9.

The glory of this second Temple would be far greater than that of the former. Solomon may have been a great king, but a greater One than Solomon is coming. Into this Temple that they were privileged to be building, The Desire of the Nations, the Son of God, the Messiah, will come. The Prince of Peace will stand and teach in this place (Haggai 2:21-23).

Focus on the glorious future

Better to begin small than not at all. God encourages the leaders and the people to be strong and work. *"Do not fear... I will fill this Temple with glory... The glory of this latter Temple shall be greater than the former... The Messiah shall come to this Temple"* Haggai 2. »

disobedience to God. Honour the Lord and He will bless you.

"Thus speaks The Lord of Hosts, saying: This people says, 'The time has not come, the time that the Lord's House should be built'... Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your panelled houses, and this Temple to lie in ruins?... Thus says The Lord of Hosts: 'Consider your ways!'" Haggai 1:2-7.

Reflect and reconsider

The prophet Haggai calls for a thoughtful response, a spiritual response, a practical response. *"Consider your ways!"* The people had made excuses for their inactivity. Times were hard. The economy was bad. Their crops had failed. The economy was depressed. They barely had enough to eat and drink. They had inadequate clothing. Their wages seemed to dwindle as though their money bags had holes.

God and all these other things will be added unto you. What is your highest priority? What are you devoting most of your time to? What are you investing your talents into? Are you laying up treasures in Heaven? Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Our priorities should be God's House, God's people, God's Creation, God's work, God's Kingdom. The Great Commission is our supreme ambition. Christ's last command must be our first concern. Life is not only about staying alive and making a living, but about

Catastrophic economic afflictions are no excuse for inactivity in God's service.

living right and living for God. Jesus is the Life. He gives His people spiritual life now, eternal life then, abundant life always.

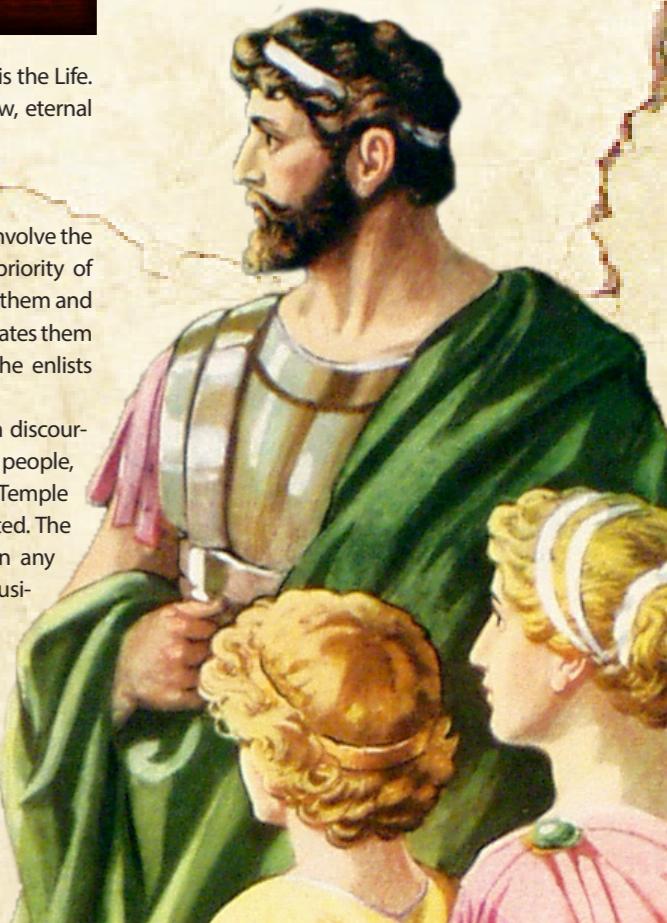
Inspired to action

Haggai seeks to inform, inspire and involve the people in this great privilege and priority of rebuilding the Temple. He motivates them and he mobilises them to action. He educates them as to what is most important and he enlists them in God's service.

As the people began building, a discouragement seized them. The older people, remembering the splendour of the Temple of Solomon, were greatly disappointed. The new Temple did not measure up in any way. Pessimists dampened the enthusiasm of the builders.

A word of encouragement

"Yet now be strong... and work; for I am with you," says The Lord of Hosts... do not fear!... The glory of this latter Temple shall be greater than





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Fulfilment in the New Testament

God oversees history. All other thrones will be overthrown. "Tremble before Him, all the earth. The earth also was firmly established. It shall not be moved" 1 Chron 16:30. But the throne of David will be occupied with the Prince of Peace. Zerubbabel is identified in the Gospels as David's descendant and in the line of the Messiah. Matthew 1:12 lists Zerubbabel in the line of Joseph, the step-father of Jesus and Luke 3:27 identifies Zerubbabel in the line of His mother Mary. Hebrews 12:26-29 quotes from this passage in Haggai: "...whose Voice then shook the earth...the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and Godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" Heb 12:26-29.

Haggai challenges the people to revise their ways of thinking. To recognise that it was when they stopped putting God and His House first, that things began to go wrong with them. God was actually causing the disasters that they were suffering from.

Change your priorities in the light of eternity

Haggai challenged the people to revise their priorities. To compare how much they had poured into their own homes and how little they had invested into God's House. What are you investing your time, talents and treasure in? Restore your devotional life. Put first

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things first. Seek first the Kingdom of God (Matt 6:33).

The people responded positively and returned to the task of rebuilding the Temple. In just three and a half weeks the builders had organised and found sufficient material to begin rebuilding. Though starting small, this Temple has a more glorious future. In it the Desire of the Nations, the Messiah, the Son of God, shall come and His glory shall outshine the Temple.

Defilement and consecration

Haggai then focussed on issues of consecration and defilement. If you put clean things with the dirty, do the clean things make the dirty clean? The priests replied that what is dirty

will defile the clean.

So Haggai asked:

If something is consecrated to the Lord and

you put it with something defiled does the consecration pass over from

the consecrated to the defiled? And the answer was 'No' (Haggai 2:11-14).

You must be sanctified

The people had the privilege to build the consecrated Temple and they needed to be consecrated as they were completing this work. Defiled people can make a consecrated Temple defiled in God's sight. We are not made clean before the Lord because of good works that we may do. In fact, we can actually contaminate the work of God if we do not put our lives right first. By use of these questions and answers, the prophet Haggai showed the people where they failed and fell short.

Why are our prayers not answered?

By helping the people realise their sinfulness, Haggai showed them why their prayers were not being answered. They had procrastinated so long on completing the Temple. They had failed to put the Kingdom of God first. And now they were spoiling much of the work they were doing because they had not repented of their sins and made right before God.

The land had suffered from their neglect. The nation had come under a curse because of idolatry and immorality. Their economy was depressed because their devotion and worship with God was neglected. Consecrated work requires consecrated workers. "Consider now from this day forward...from the day that the foundation of The Lord's Temple was laid...from this day I will bless you" Haggai 2:15-19.

Ezra records the results

"So the elders... prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet... And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel...Now the Temple was finished...Then the children of Israel... »



"For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

'I will dwell in them and walk among them.'

I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

2 Corinthians 6:16

celebrated the dedication of this House of God with joy. And they offered sacrifices..." Ezra 6:14-17. The next day the people were blessed with rain, and the drought was broken.

The signet ring

The signet ring (Haggai 2:23) refers to the engraved stone set in gold that represented the authority of the bearer. To affix a seal, or to fasten by sealing with the impression of a signet, confirmed and formalised treaties, covenants, and laws. God was restoring the royal line of David through Zerubbabel who would have the privilege of being in the line of the Messiah Himself, the Son of David, the

give Him priority. He demands purity from His people. Consecrated work needs consecrated workers. "And what agreement has the Temple of God with idols? For you are the Temple of The Living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.'" 2 Corinthians 6:16-17

Ultimate priorities

God is in control of all things, including economic conditions. Poor harvests are not caused by accidents of nature, or by

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Prince of Peace, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Restorer of the heritage of God's people. Christ will be the new Temple that can never be destroyed. Those who attempted to tear Him down found that in three days He rose from the dead. Jesus Christ is the Resurrection and the Life, no-one comes to the Father except through Him. He has risen! Alive forevermore! He is reigning on high and He will come to judge the living and the dead.

God will crush His enemies

Those who declare war on God will lose. God is all-knowing, everywhere present and all-powerful. God is eternal, he is infinite, no-one can resist His Will. God warns that He will overthrow those kingdoms that are in resistance to Him. He will overthrow their armies. He will judge the nations. Haggai refers to God as The Lord of Hosts. This is a Name that describes the greatness of God. He is more powerful than any earthly nation, and richer than every kingdom on earth combined. God demands that His people

blind fate, but by the Living God who communicates through hardships and afflictions to teach important spiritual measures. There can be no half measures in the service of God. We have to put His eternal interests before our own temporal concerns. We cannot make excuses for delaying to obey the Word of God and to fulfil His Work. We need to review our lives to see how God may be speaking to us. We need to prove our repentance by our actions.

Even though nations are going to be in turmoil, God who governs the affairs of nations never forgets the individual. The Church of Christ is greater than the Temples built by Solomon and Zerubbabel. "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the Temple of God, God will destroy him. For the Temple of God is holy, which temple you are" 1 Cor 3:16-17. ■

DR PETER HAMMOND is a missionary, author and conference speaker. See www.frontline.org.za