

The Book of Haggai – Sermon 4th October 2015

Preamble:

This morning's reading is from the book of Haggai

- He one of the Minor Prophets, writing the third from last book in the Old Testament.
- We don't know anything about him except that he prophesied for a 4 month period about 520 years before Jesus was born

A remnant of the Jews had returned from exile about 18 years before this

- And had started rebuilding the temple but the work had stalled.
- The money had run out, there were not many of them
- And the land was going through an economic recession
- Into this Then God spoke to the people through Haggai the prophet.
- I'm going to read the whole book, all 2 chapters!

Reading: Haggai 1:1 – 2:23

A Call to Build the House of the LORD

In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest:

² *This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD's house.'"*

³ *Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: ⁴ "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"*

⁵ *Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. ⁶ You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."*

⁷ *This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. ⁸ Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honoured," says the LORD. ⁹ "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. ¹⁰ Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. ¹¹ I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labour of your hands."*

¹² *Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD.*

¹³ *Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: "I am with you," declares the LORD. ¹⁴ So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month.*

The Promised Glory of the New House

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

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

Blessings for a Defiled People

¹⁰ On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Haggai: ¹¹ “This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Ask the priests what the law says: ¹² If someone carries consecrated meat in the fold of their garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, olive oil or other food, does it become consecrated?’” The priests answered, “No.”

¹³ Then Haggai said, “If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled?” “Yes,” the priests replied, “it becomes defiled.”

¹⁴ Then Haggai said, ““So it is with this people and this nation in my sight,’ declares the LORD. ‘Whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled.

¹⁵ ““Now give careful thought to this from this day on^[b]—consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the LORD’s temple. ¹⁶ When anyone came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When anyone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were only twenty. ¹⁷ I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not return to me,’ declares the LORD. ¹⁸ ‘From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the LORD’s temple was laid. Give careful thought: ¹⁹ Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit. ““From this day on I will bless you.””

Zerubbabel the LORD’s Signet Ring

²⁰ The word of the LORD came to Haggai a second time on the twenty-fourth day of the month: ²¹ “Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. ²² I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother.

²³ ““On that day,’ declares the LORD Almighty, ‘I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,’ declares the LORD Almighty.”

Introduction

Haggai is a small book, only Obadiah is shorter.

- It is not well known
- And not often preached on.
- It shares a lot of similarities with Zechariah which was written about the same time.
- But doesn't really have any of the messianic prophecies so is not often quoted.

Yet it is one on the books of the bible

- And therefore worth reading.
- There are obvious themes that we identify with
- They were building a temple, we are extending the church.
- They were a relatively small group of people with limited resources.
- In the midst of an economic recession
- In an area that was neither wealthy nor politically significant at that time.

However I am reluctant to make too many comparisons with ourselves

- There are significant differences
- The Old Testament Temple was a very different concept from a church building
- The temple was the dwelling place of God among his people
- Since Jesus God lives in his people – not in buildings
- Paul tells the Ephesians. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

“You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

So before we look at how this applies to us

- Let’s look at the context in which it was written, or spoken

Historical Background

The story begins in 586BC with the exile,

- This story is told in 2 Chronicles 36

The Fall of Jerusalem

¹⁵ *The LORD, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. ¹⁶ But they mocked God’s messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. ¹⁷ He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and did not spare young men or young women, the elderly or the infirm. God gave them all into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁸ He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God,*

both large and small, and the treasures of the LORD's temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. ¹⁹ They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there.

²⁰ He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his successors until the kingdom of Persia came to power. ²¹ The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfilment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah.

²² In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfil the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:

²³ "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

"The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up, and may the LORD their God be with them."

These few verses cover 70 years

- After the exile to Babylon the people begin to settle
- They redefine their worship through synagogues
- Set up businesses there and become wealthy and secure
- Then the Babylonian empire falls and Cyrus becomes emperor

He has a different policy and encourages people to return home

- His proviso is that they build places of worship there and pray for him to their God.
- In the event only 50 thousand take up the offer.
- Initially the work goes well as we read in Ezra and Nehemiah
- But when Darius succeeds Cyrus the money dries up
- He needs it for his military campaigns.

As the money dries up the work stalls

- Eighteen years later the remnant are led by 2 men, Joshua, the High priest
- And Zerubbabel who was governor and, significantly, a descendent of David
- He is grandson and only living relative of Jehoiachin, the last legitimate king of Judah

There has been economic recession and drought in the land

- Food is scarce and work hard, No one has much to spare for he work.
- Remember, these people had given up comfortable lives in Babylon
- Like Abraham had come to a far country that many of them had never seen.
- God had seemed to bless them at first but now it all seems to be going wrong.
- They are discouraged and ask why, what have we done wrong?

The Message of Haggai

Then God sends a message to the people by Haggai the prophet.

- He says your thinking is wrong
- He twice says "Give careful thought to your ways" (Ch. 1 vs. 5,7)
- The work hasn't stopped because you have run out of money

- Or because you are suffering food shortages.

The lack of money and drought are caused because you have stopped work

- Look at your own houses, they are comfortable
- Yet God's house is in ruins.
- Where do your priorities lie?

Impressively the people respond

- We read in verse 12 (Chap. 1)
"Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD."
- God 'stirs up their spirits (vs. 14) and they begin to restart the work
- Haggai encourages them with a message from God saying "I am with you" (vs. 13)

However, less than 2 months later they are beginning to become discouraged again

- Some people are criticising the work
- This new temple is nothing like as big or as grand as Solomon's temple..
- So God speaks again (Chap 2: vs. 4)
- *⁴But now be strong, Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD. 'Be strong, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the LORD, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the LORD Almighty.*

And He promises great things

- What makes this temple great is not its size or magnificence
- It will be great because God will be there.
- Verse 7-9

⁷I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty. ⁸'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty. ⁹'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty."

So they all carry on

- But a couple of months later they are beginning to doubt again
- The rains have not come, the harvest may well fail again.
- Haven't they obeyed God
- Didn't He say the drought was due to their lack of commitment to building?

And God speaks again

- This time with a set of questions.
- Asking about cleanliness.
- If something dirty touches something clean, Does the dirty thing become clean or the clean thing dirty?
- Of course the answer is that the dirty object makes the clean object dirty.

So Haggai says this is the problem.

- They, the builder are unclean and building a holy temple
- They thought they were holy because they were building a holy temple
- But they were contaminating the temple, the temple was not making them clean.
- Once again they are told to give careful thought (vs.15)

Once again the people respond

- We don't know what the issue was, what sins were being referred to
- But the people put it right.
- And God promises *"From this day on I will bless you."*

And that is pretty much the end of the story.

- Haggai has one last message from God
- A personal note to the Governor
- The man who should have been King but there is no kingdom
- And the county is ruled from Persia.

God reaffirms his promise to David

- That a descendant of his will always be on the throne
- A promise ultimately fulfilled by Jesus
- And we know Zerrubbabel will be ancestor to both Mary and Joseph.

But God encourages him

- You might not feel like much
- But I am going to *'shake the heavens and the earth'* (Vs. 21)
- And then in verse 23
"On that day,' declares the LORD Almighty, 'I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,' declares the LORD, 'and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,' declares the LORD Almighty."

Zerrubbabel is important, not because of his ancestry,

- or because of his deeds
- But because God has chosen him.

Lessons from Haggai

So what Lessons are there for us from Haggai?

- How can we apply this to ourselves
- Well I have three suggestions

1. Getting our priorities right

Firstly we need to get our priorities right

- God should come first.

- We should not be giving to God what is left over after we have met our own needs

We must 'think carefully' about this

- It is not true that the more we have the more we give to God
- Neither is it true that the more we give God the more we get
- But the truth is the more we give to God the further what we have goes.

This is true of money, time or effort.

- If we get our priorities right
- We can achieve much more with our resources.
- That is part of what the CAP course teaches about money.
- But I would suggest it is true of time as well.

If you are stressed and have too much to do

- Try to put God first, make time to pray each morning
- Insist on making time to come to church
- Keep Sunday special for God, not just another work day
- And see if God enables you to finish the work in the remaining 6 days.

In Matthew 6 Jesus tells his disciples *"Do Not Worry"* (Matt. 6:25-34)

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?"²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life^[e]?

²⁸ "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?"³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

2. Letting God make us clean

Secondly we need to be made clean

- Working hard for God
- Even being obedient to Him is not enough
- We have to be made clean.

The Psalmist says (Psalm 24:3-5)

³ *Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?*

⁴ *The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.*

⁵ *They will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God their Saviour.*

Jesus came not so we could do good works

- But so we could be reconciled to God our Father
- So we could be made righteous and thus be allowed in His presence.
- The writer to the Hebrews urges us

Since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.
(Heb. 10:21-23)

3. Glory comes from God not from our own efforts

And finally we should not be ashamed of the little we do

- Or proud of how much we achieve
- Glory only comes from God being present.

This is true of all we do

- But I suggest important for us to remember as we prepare for phase 2 of the building extension
- The value of the building is not in bricks and mortar,
- Or in extra space for our activities.

The value will be in God using us and using it

- God's presence in our midst
- God's activity by His Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

I want to finish with Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian church

- 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith.¹² We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen