

HAGGAI: CALLING GOD'S PEOPLE BACK TO HIS WORK

I: God's Call To Complete The Temple Construction

(Haggai 1:1-15)

I. Introduction

- A. Haggai, the first prophet after the Babylonian Captivity, was assigned by God to direct Israel to get back to the work of rebuilding the temple after the work had been delayed for 15 years. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, p. 1306, "Introduction to the Book of Haggai")
- B. Since the civil governor Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua were the leaders of the people, Haggai addressed primarily them in regard to the temple completion issue. (Ibid., "The Recipients")
- C. Haggai 1:1-15 expresses God's initial call to complete the temple, and we view it for our application:

II. God's Call To Complete The Temple Construction, Haggai 1:1-15.

- A. Haggai began his ministry by being led of God to address the governor Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua, that through them the returned Hebrew exiles might be led to return to the temple building work, Haggai 1:1.
- B. God noted that the people had said that the time had not come for the Lord's temple to be rebuilt, their reason for not finishing the temple, Haggai 1:2. From the historical context in Ezra 4:23-24, we know that Gentile foes had persuaded Persia's king Artaxerxes to rule that the work be halted, so we might think that the people had just cause to believe that God had used the emperor to signal that the time was not right to finish the work.
- C. However, this was an ungodly excuse as revealed in Haggai 1:3-11:
 1. As God clarified through Haggai, the people had built their own houses using "expensive timber" that "had to be imported" while leaving God's temple work unfinished, Haggai 1:3-4; Ibid., fn. to Haggai 1:4.
 2. In addition, the livelihoods of the people had been depleted in accord with the judgments of the Mosaic Covenant, signaling that God was punishing them for sin, Haggai 1:5-6:
 - a. The Mosaic Covenant provided that if Israel sinned in the dispensation of the Law, the people would suffer agricultural and material lack, Deuteronomy 28:15-20.
 - b. This was the experience of the returned Hebrew exiles: They had sown much but reaped little; they ate, but it was not filling them; they drank, but were not filled with drink; they clothed themselves, but they could not stay warm and the wages they earned were exposed to inflation so that it was like putting coins that had been earned into a bag with holes in it, Haggai 1:5-6.
 3. God's prophet then directed that the people go up to the mountain and bring wood to build the temple of the Lord, that He would then take pleasure in it and be glorified, Haggai 1:7-8.
 4. However, due to their failure to address God's will of rebuilding the temple, the people had looked for much in their livelihood endeavors but it had come to little, and when they brought the produce and wages earned home, God had figuratively blown on it to disperse it as punishment for their not working on the temple, Haggai 1:9. The heaven above had withheld its dew from irrigating crops so that the harvest had lacked, Haggai 1:10. God had called for a drought on the land, the mountains, the grain, the new wine, the olive oil, on what the ground produced and on men, cattle and the work of their hands, Haggai 1:11.
- D. Just 23 days later (Ibid., fn. to Haggai 1:12-15), the governor Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest with all the remnant of the Hebrew exiles obeyed the word of God through Haggai, revering the Lord, Haggai 1:12.
- E. Haggai then spoke as the Lord's messenger to encourage the people, saying, "I am with you, declares the Lord," Haggai 1:13 ESV. "This assurance of God's presence to guide and empower them should have cast out all fear and apprehension about accomplishing their designated task of rebuilding," B. K. C., O. T., p. 1540.
- F. The Lord Himself was involved in this movement: He stirred up Zerubbabel and Joshua with all the people so that 23 days later they came to the temple site and resumed the reconstruction work, Haggai 1:14-15.

Lesson: *The returned Hebrew exiles claimed that the Persian emperor Artaxerxes' order to cease work on the temple indicated that it was not God's time to finish it where the real problem lay in errant priorities of putting one's own profits ahead of the Lord's calling. When this sin was exposed by Haggai and by God's withholding material and livelihood blessings in punishment for not working on the temple, the people returned to the work.*

Application: *(1) May we put God's ministry assignments for us ahead of our personal interests. (2) If God calls us to start a ministry, may we complete. (3) May we NOT "read" God's will as being what some secular ruler dictates, for secular rulers and God do not always agree with each other! (Acts 5:29) We need to follow God as a priority! (4) If God calls us to give a corrective message like Haggai, may we trust Him to make that message impact others.*