

Period of Restoration (535-425 BCE)

Preaching of Haggai and Zechariah

Readings: Haggai 1:1-2:23; Zechariah 1:1-6

Reflections:

- The short messages of encouragement from Haggai give us a window into their preaching during this phase of this remnant group rebuilding the temple. Scholars speculate that Haggai is one of the Israelites that remembered Solomon's temple and that would make him at least 75 years old. Zechariah on the other hand is most likely a very young man, born in Babylon to a priestly family of Iddo. They began this preaching around 520 BCE.
- "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains in ruin?" This passage is often used for fundraising to build new church buildings. Today perhaps a more appropriate application is the building of the community. Are we spending our money on personal comfort over investing in getting the message out and serving those in need?
- "You have planted much, but have harvested little." This is the principle of the tithe at work in this story. Israel was not putting God first in their lives and so they were not receiving his blessing. See Malachi 3:10 for more direct explanation of this.
- Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest, represent two kinds of leadership within Israel. Zerubbabel represented the organizational leadership (like a Moses) and Joshua the priestly and pastoral leadership (like Aaron). These were in a sense the "dad" and "mom" of Israel.
- We see a strong emphasis in this section on the spirit of God moving through the community and leadership to accomplish this task. "The Lord stirred up the spirit..." this phrase likely means that the spirit of God stirred the spirits of the people.
- Apparently the older ones among them were very discouraged by the small dimensions and simple appearance of this rebuilt temple. They were remembering the previous one under Solomon and were discouraged. Yet, if we remember from the meta-narrative, God was happy with a simple tent. God had never asked for a big temple like the other religions had around them. This smaller temple was more in keeping with the imagery of God's original intent. And so where does God place the emphasis? "Be strong...and work. For I am with you! ...My spirit remains among you. Do not fear!" It wasn't the building that should have

mattered. It was God's presence. It isn't the wineskin but the wine that really matters. The people were focused on the externals rather than on the internals. They were into the place rather than the person. When God is with us, what else matters? As we will see, one day the image of the temple will be completely replaced by the image of the new temple, the body of Christ, the people of God (Ephesians 2:21).

- "The glory of this house will be greater than the glory of the former house....and in this place I will grant peace." As we continue to move through the meta-narrative we see that it is the presence of God that brings peace (shalom). God's power and grace through his Spirit reveals the glory of God and as this happens, the effects of the curse are removed and the peace of the garden is restored. Now this prophetic word of Haggai (2:8,9) foreshadows what we will see revealed when the Messiah appears. The community of Christ-followers who become the new temple will be filled with the Spirit and will in turn bring into the world the message of peace and reconciliation as they serve as God's agents of grace.
- Zechariah's message (1:1-6) is very simple. Return to God and he will return to you. Repentance is simply turning around and heading back to God. The people needed to do what we need to do: remain relentlessly focused on God alone.
- Haggai underscores the sin of the people and the consequences that came from their turning away from God in Haggai 2:10-19. We see that as the people lived disregarding their covenanted relationship with God, they were left barren and desolate. And yet, they did not have a change of heart because of their pain. Over and over again we see that they did not nor could not remain committed to God. Their hearts needed to be changed from the inside out for that to happen. The spirit of God could stir them but it still was not living permanently within them.
- Yet, God in his mercy declares, "From this day on I will bless you." God's heart was still to bless Israel and to complete his promise of blessing the nations of the world through them.
- Haggai ends with a promise to Zerubbabel that seems to point past the man to a coming ruler, the Messiah: "I will shake the heavens and the earth. I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. ...I will take you, my servant...and I will make you like my signet ring (sign of ultimate authority), for I have chosen you." Zerubbabel was another symbol of a coming leader who would overthrow all of the principalities and powers of this world and would be God's chosen one to carry his authority. Out of this weak group of humble Israelites, God again points to his ability to use the weak and humble to reveal his ultimate power over all those who would seek their own glory and power.