

**THE BOOK OF HAGGAI**  
**Lesson 5, Chapter 2 Concluded END**

In our introduction to the Book of Haggai I explained that significant historical background is needed, as well as the elucidation of special terminology that we find in the original Hebrew, to properly examine the Book of Haggai and capture what the author intended to impart. Otherwise, we get only a very surface understanding of it, nor can we comprehend why the rebuilding of the Temple was of importance not only to the returning Judeans (even though many didn't realize its full impact), but especially to Yehoveh their God since it was symbolic of the covenant He has made with Israel.

We've talked about some of this, but now I want to address another perspective that would have been of paramount interest to the common Judean returnee. It is that the Temple was more than a religious symbol, it also reflected a political structure that was the norm not just for centuries, but for millennia. It is that a Temple was always associated with the legitimization of the king, even of the king's dynasty. We simply do not find a king at any point in biblical history...whether Hebrew or gentile... who did not support certain gods and claiming they supported him, and so, building at least one Temple for them to be near to that king. In other words, the gods were assumed to be validating the legitimacy of a king, and a Temple was the visible symbol and reminder of their validation. National identity, religious identity, and the head of political system (the king) were essentially all wrapped up together in one cohesive package. It was not imaginable to the common citizen that all would not be present as a single organic unit.

With that understanding, let's consider the fate of the returning Judeans. They were in a strange situation. When they left as unwilling exiles, it was from a defeated, formerly sovereign Hebrew nation. Now, as they return to the same place, it is no longer a Hebrew nation but rather a Persian province. Indeed, the enlightened Persian King Darius was encouraging the Judeans to rebuild their Temple to worship their God as they pleased, even appointing a Hebrew High Priest of the proper lineage as the foundation for a revived (and biblically proper) priesthood. However, this would all be happening under a governor and not a king. The governor...although an Israelite descended from David...

was in no way a king nor was there any thought that he would have kingly powers, let alone would he ever evolve in time to become a king. So, even though the people would have a strong and virtually independent Temple and priesthood, how was this going to work without an Israelite king over them? One element of that organic structure they had been used to was now gone.

This would have been a transition of some magnitude for the Judeans and, of course, transitions of most any kind are messy and uneven. One of the interesting side effects was that whereas in the Israelite system the Temple and Priesthood were separate from the civil government with a civil king at its head (truly a separation of Church and State so to speak), now the system Persia set up was that Joshua, the High Priest, would co-govern alongside Zerubbabel the governor, who was essentially a hired Persian civil servant. The civil and the religious mixed and overlapped in the most tangible ways. The Hebrew High Priest was granted new powers no High Priest ever had before. In reality, the balance of governing power now slanted heavily towards Joshua, the High Priest and away from the civil governor, Zerubbabel.

The good news was that upon leaving Egypt, and at Mt. Sinai the creation of Israel as a separate people and nation, Moses and Aaron formed a somewhat similar kind of government as the Judeans now had, which the Judeans could look back to. So, they at least had a historical model they could feel somewhat comfortable with. Moses (like Zerubbabel) was not a king, but Aaron (like Joshua) most certainly was the High Priest. Even so, Moses had special privileges within the Tabernacle that even Aaron did not. Moses had power heavily slanted towards him that combined some of the religious but more with the civil. This dynamic would change around 1000 B.C. when the era of the Kings of Israel dawned after the chaotic, roughly 2 century period of the Judges of Israel. So, there is no evidence that the returning Judeans balked at the increased power bestowed upon Joshua. To put it in more modern terms, the Judeans in Yehud were under more of an actual theocracy upon their return to their homeland than even when Moses ruled, or when Israelite kings ruled.

All in all, this didn't end the Judean's memory of, and longing for, the return of the system they admired and wanted most: a king with the civil authority,

alongside a Temple and Priesthood with the religious authority, in a proper, Torah-prescribed balance. Therefore, there would be struggles and anxieties and disagreements over everything religious and civil as they undertook rebuilding the Temple, and for many centuries into the future. And, while this doesn't come into play too much in the Books of Haggai or Zechariah, by the late 300's B.C. or so, an entirely new religious institution would be established among the Hebrews: the Synagogue. Upon the creation of the Synagogue, Israel suddenly found itself with 2 separate religious institutions: the Temple with its priesthood, and the Synagogue with its lay-leaders. And this, too, would create its own tensions and anxieties and struggles.

Let's re-open our Bibles to Haggai chapter 2.

### **RE-READ HAGGAI CHAPTER 2:10 – end**

We more or less ended up last time by discussing two questions that God, through Haggai, directed at the priesthood concerning the matters of holiness and uncleanness, and how or if these could be transferred from one person or object to another. I recommend reviewing last week's lesson to get a more thorough answer. However, the bottom line is that holiness could NOT be transmitted in any way except by God doing it, while uncleanness *could* be transmitted in any number of ways from person to person, person to object, or object to object. What I want us to notice is that this question *was* directed to the priests, and without doubt to the people of that day that alone was added validation of the increased authority of the Priesthood that came even before the Temple reconstruction was completed.

Let's address yet another perspective that did not escape the people of that day, but also disputes a common claim of the more modern liberal-oriented Christian scholars of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and now 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. And that claim is that the Torah did not actually exist until after the Jews returned from Babylon in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

We find this in Leviticus chapter 10.

**CJB Leviticus 10:8-11** ***<sup>8</sup> ADONAI said to Aharon, <sup>9</sup> "Don't drink any wine or other intoxicating liquor, neither you nor your sons with you, when you enter the tent of meeting, so that you will not die. This is to be a permanent regulation through all your generations, <sup>10</sup> so that you will distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; <sup>11</sup> and so that you will teach the people of Isra'el all the laws ADONAI has told them through Moshe."***

Think for a moment on the 2 questions God set before the priests about holiness and uncleanness. Why would God expect the priests to know the answers to those questions if He had not previously provided a resource to find out? In Leviticus 10 it is commanded that the priests were to be the teachers of the laws given at Mt. Sinai so they had to know the answers in order to properly respond to God's questions. This is concrete evidence that the Torah existed... in fact, *had* to exist... long before the Judeans returned to Babylon because God's instructions about holiness and ritual purity obviously had already been taught, and God expected the priests to know it, and clearly the priests were to be the teaching authority to the rest of the Israelites.

If the common Judeans didn't recognize that the priests were the Torah experts and knew the answers to religious questions, they wouldn't have shown any regard to what they had to say. But, there were very technical questions with answers that would have been mostly known to the priests and not thoroughly understood by the common Hebrew. Especially the Elders... who all throughout history right until today... are tasked with being the guardians of historical truth and cultural traditions by passing them along to the next generation, would have screamed loudly and revolted at the newly revived priesthood if they were just making stuff up that had never before existed.

After this matter of holy and unclean were properly explained, then the outcome was applied by Haggai as a metaphor to pronounce the condition of the Judean people.

**CJB Haggai 2:14** ***Hagai then said, "'That is the condition of this people, that is the condition of this nation before me,' says ADONAI, 'and that***

***is the condition of everything their hands produce; so that anything they offer there is unclean.***

God views the Judeans as unclean. Therefore, everything they touch becomes unclean. Therefore, the sacrifices and offerings they bring to Yehoveh are unclean because obviously those unclean Judeans had touched them. This rendered whatever they offered not acceptable to Him. The giving of this oracle is the moment when the priests and the people should have become aware that they had definitely put the cart before the horse when they quickly rebuilt the Altar and began sacrificing before they had rebuilt the Temple. So much so, that without the Temple their uncleanness could not possibly be solved. They would remain unclean in God's eyes regardless of whatever else they may have thought could resolve the problem. They could obey other parts of the Torah, be good family people, honest and hard workers and sincere in other areas of their lives, but an immovable God-principle is that sin in one part of your life cascades into other parts, even if you don't recognize it.

It is important to remember that sin also brings about a condition of uncleanness upon the sinner. Blood atones for sin, but it does not cleanse a worshipper from the uncleanness that his sin causes. Typically, it takes an immersion into water to be cleansed from the impurity. But, if the disobedience that is the source of the sin, which then becomes the cause of the uncleanness, only continues unabated, then water immersion is of no help. And this was the situation for those returning Judeans. Because their ongoing sin was their lack of effort and dedication to rebuild the Temple, as ordered by God, then they remained in an unclean state. Their unclean state corrupted their sacrifices, which, in turn, made their sacrifices unacceptable and without effect, and therefore they not only remained unclean but also their guilt was not being atoned for. A true Catch-22 situation that *did* have a remedy, but only one; the one Haggai was bringing to the people. Rebuild that Temple and do it now!

So, now the object lesson was presented about the bad circumstance these Judeans had created for themselves. In verses 15 and 16 we read:

**CJB Haggai 2:15-16** ***<sup>15</sup> Now, please, from this day on, keep this in mind: before you began laying stones on each other to rebuild the temple of ADONAI, <sup>16</sup> throughout that whole time, when someone approached a twenty-measure pile [of grain], he found only ten; and when he came to the winepress to draw out fifty measures, there were only twenty.***

The idea is that the Judeans are to reflect on what they have been experiencing, now that the cause and effect have been carefully explained. What verse 15 literally says is "before you began laying stone upon stone". This is speaking about laying the foundation for the Temple and not necessarily building its walls. But, of course, the construction project had stopped at rebuilding the foundation and had been in a state of suspended animation for the past 15 years. The result? Something those Judeans had not connected with their ignoring rebuilding God's House. When fields were planted the results were only 50% of what would have been usually expected. It was even worse when it came to the grape harvest. The grapes produced only 40% as much juice as one would have thought. So, total deprivation was not the problem, but these paltry yields did bring about hardship and disappointment, and the people were frustrated about it.

This idea of directly connecting divine blessing with our obedience to The Father is something that is less and less considered in our faith. Sadly, some have tried to misuse or perhaps to reformulate this God-principle by establishing something called the Prosperity Doctrine. Interestingly, those who benefit the most from this Church doctrine are those Pastors that tell their congregations to follow it. At the risk of being branded a heretic, I tell you that the Prosperity Doctrine has no connection at all to what the Judeans were experiencing, nor is it a doctrine that any worshipper of God ought to consider. It is false, a pure hoax and a deception.

This biblical God-principle that is highlighted in Haggai is **not** about a quid pro quo connecting how much you get from God with how much you give. It's about the blessings from Heaven that you receive from heart-felt obedience in every facet of your life. But, because God is a just God, then it is also about the blessings withheld due to lack of obedience. The Judeans were certainly

offering their costly sacrifices; but what they weren't doing was being obedient to build the Temple, so they were experiencing lack. Such a doctrine as the Prosperity Doctrine is only possible for Believers to accept because Christianity has, in general, simply watered down or even abolished the concept of obedience to God's laws and commands. In its place, the new obedience directive is mainly focused on giving to the Church. Yes, giving is a command; but it is just one of hundreds. So, by no means am I demeaning giving or telling you that it is not an obligation placed upon you by The Father. But, as Haggai's prophecy is telling us, the lack of obedience in one area of your life will infect and affect other areas of your life, and will also thereby affect whether you receive blessings from above, or not. And, those blessings may not be monetary or material; they may amount primarily to inner peace. To good health. To an abundance of children. To your security and protection. To general sufficiency and so much more that isn't necessarily reflected in wealth.

So, says verse 17, God even went so far not only to withhold blessings, but to actually bring about disasters. All of these... scorching heat, green mold, hail... are natural disasters. It reminds us that God controls all, including the weather. The language of this verse is very much like we find in the Torah, in the Book of Deuteronomy.

**CJB Deuteronomy 28:15-23** <sup>15</sup> ***"But if you refuse to pay attention to what ADONAI your God says, and do not observe and obey all his mitzvot and regulations which I am giving you today, then all the following curses will be yours in abundance: <sup>16</sup> "A curse on you in the city, and a curse on you in the countryside. <sup>17</sup> "A curse on your grain-basket and kneading-bowl. <sup>18</sup> "A curse on the fruit of your body, the fruit of your land and the young of your cattle and flocks. <sup>19</sup> "A curse on you when you come in, and a curse on you when you go out. <sup>20</sup> "ADONAI will send on you curses, disasters and frustration in everything you set out to do, until you are destroyed and quickly perish, because of your evil actions in abandoning me. <sup>21</sup> "ADONAI will bring on you a plague that will stay with you until he has exterminated you from the land you are entering in order to take possession of it. <sup>22</sup> ADONAI will strike you down with wasting diseases, fever, inflammation, fiery heat, drought, blasting winds and mildew; and***

***they will pursue you until you perish. <sup>23</sup> "The sky over your head will be brass and the earth under you iron.***

God doesn't make up the consequences for disobedience on-the-fly any more than He makes up His laws and commands as He goes along. Israel was given God's moral code and commands, written down and taught to them. They were disobedient to those laws and commands, so the very consequences God promised came about. A word to the wise: despite what you may have heard, this has not changed. Being a Believer comes with greater obligations obey God's commandments; not lesser.

But what is more, says the Lord, even after these disasters you would not return to Me. I want to offer what I confess is speculation, and yet I am certain this is the case because it is how we are as human beings and God followers. They didn't return to God because of these troubling events they were suffering because they didn't believe it was God that would actually bring them about. In fact, the Judeans probably felt very good about themselves, thinking none of these Torah curses would apply to them, as they were actually among the small minority of Jews to return from Babylon. And for them, they saw merely the act of returning as a demonstration of their own piety and righteousness.

I wonder: in this present era when the worldwide concern is climate change...however much or little you might personally believe it is anything to be concerned about... does anyone think this might be God's doing? Is it even considered that the Church and Synagogue have both pretty much moved in lock-step with the world in moving away from biblical laws and commands and instead into following their own manmade doctrines and traditions that tend to rationalize wicked behaviors of our societies, and minimize the severe side of God, because those newer doctrines have become accepted and popular?

As we see cancer and other diseases seeming to be on the rise and spreading at lightning speed; a general unease among people and chaos bursting out without a continent spared; political systems in convulsion and turmoil; wars; starvation and depravations increasing despite the best efforts of science and charitable groups; do we ever sincerely ask ourselves, is this God reacting and



therefore we need to inquire what it is that is offending Him? Somehow, even in Judaism and Christianity, such a thought has lately been ascribed to nothing but a primitive and backward view of the world. But... should we ask the question... then I ask you, to which of our behaviors could we owe this reaction of God? My view is that even the God-believing part of the world would either have a wide array of suspected causes... fuzzy and involving mostly our emotions or things that bother us the most... or there would be no coherent no idea at all because each religious faction is sure that nothing they are doing could possibly bring on an adverse reaction from God. If the Judeo and Christian world have both essentially abandoned God's laws and commands, trading them in for our own evolving ideals, then how would anyone know what it is that might be offending Him? That is the conundrum I think our entire world is suffering today, and it is not unlike the conundrum the Judeans were experiencing in Haggai's era.

So, now that God has presented the entire story to His people to explain why they are experiencing these frustrations and lack of abundance, here is His encouragement.

**CJB Haggai 2:18-19 <sup>18</sup> 'So please keep this in mind, from this day on, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day the foundation of ADONAI's temple was laid, consider this: <sup>19</sup> there's no longer any seed in the barn, is there? and the vine, fig tree, pomegranate tree and olive tree have produced nothing yet, right? However, from this day on, I will bless you.'"**

Clearly, as of the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month, the foundation was finally completed. Or, very likely, something *beyond* the foundation laying had occurred... such as the gathering of materials to continue the rebuild... so we must try to understand this from the ancient Middle Eastern viewpoint. The reality is that when cities were destroyed in ancient times, the building foundations were only rarely ever disturbed. In fact, usually when people came back years later to rebuild, the foundations were already there and they even used the rubble of the former buildings as their building material for the new. A foundation for something like a large Temple is nearly indestructible. Even when the Romans sacked Jerusalem in 70 A.D., while they knocked down walls

to the Temple and its retaining walls, they didn't disturb the foundation stones. If one has ever been to Jerusalem and been to the so-called Western wall, the reality is that this is mostly the foundation stones you were viewing. And, even those were the tip of the iceberg. Under them lay even larger stones. The point being, the Romans didn't do anything to the foundation stones because it would have been very difficult to displace them even with their advanced technology for that era, and would have served no point.

More likely, what occurred at this ceremony was a symbolic founding of the new Temple. This is not to say there was an error in the Scriptures; rather it how these words traditionally have been interpreted and translated. History in other ancient cultures, as in the Bible, reveal ceremonies... sometimes at various stages of building... for Temples and palaces. Whatever was exactly the construction stage this passage is speaking of it no doubt included visible proof of a change of heart, and a firm rededication of the people and the leadership to complete the job. It was apparently enough evidence of their sincerity that God believed them and told them that from this ceremonial date forward, His blessings for them would be restored.

That said, manna would not start falling from the sky to bolster their food supply. All that would happen is that normal weather patterns would return beginning with the next seeding and planting. It was going to take time... another harvest season (for each kind of harvest)... before normal yields would resume. But, the people were reassured that all would be well from this point forward, with the hope that they had learned their lesson. It was the fruitful harvests that would be the ultimate proof of the return of God's blessings, and I imagine that the people waited with a certain amount of anxiety for the promise to turn into that material reality they so hoped for.

Verse 20 changes course with a new prophecy; actually, it is the second prophecy of that same day. Notice also that this is happening on the same day that the symbolic founding of the new Temple was being celebrated by the people, and commended by Yehoveh.

This new prophecy is directed at Zerubbabel, the governor of the province. It speaks again of the shaking that God is going to do, and how this will bring down the governments of the world, as well as the destruction of their militaries. When, in verse 22, Yehoveh says that He will “overthrow” the thrones of kingdoms, the Hebrew verb is ***haphak***. It is a word that when used in the scriptures, denotes God’s intervention into the affairs of humanity. It means the divinely caused overthrow of political entities... governments. The last half of this verse says how this overthrow will happen:

**CJB Haggai 2:22** *...and I will overturn the chariots and the people riding in them; the horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother.*

Whereas God overthrew the political entities of Sodom and Gomorrah by cosmic and supernatural means, this verse says this will occur in the same kind of a way His own people Israel was overthrown: by divinely caused military defeat. Of course, the question is: when will this happen? Without doubt, this would have been something Haggai expected to happen soon or in some not too distant time. The hope for this to happen was especially poignant because of the current political reality of the Holy Land; the Judeans being under the rule of a foreign king, and no doubt when Haggai spoke this prophecy to the people it only heightened that hope.

However, there are other clues that tell us that this would not be the case. This shaking and overthrowing were going to be not just a future, but also an End Times, happening. The Hebrews did have an End Times theology; but, just as in Yeshua’s day when the people then still had this same End Times theology, and believed they were living in the End Times, it was not to be. The people of Yeshua’s day were so certain of it, as were especially His own disciples and later the 1<sup>st</sup> generation Apostles, that He was forced to speak on the subject. Virtually the entire chapter of Matthew 24 is devoted to this subject, but I’ll quote just a few verses that are the most pertinent for what we’re studying today.

**CJB Matthew 24:5-8** ***<sup>5</sup> For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah!' and they will lead many astray. <sup>6</sup> You will hear the noise***

*of wars nearby and the news of wars far off; see to it that you don't become frightened. Such things must happen, but the end is yet to come. <sup>7</sup> For peoples will fight each other, nations will fight each other, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various parts of the world; <sup>8</sup> all this is but the beginning of the 'birth-pains.'*

**CJB Matthew 24:34-39** *<sup>34</sup> Yes! I tell you that this people will certainly not pass away before all these things happen. <sup>35</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. <sup>36</sup> "But when that day and hour will come, no one knows- not the angels in heaven, not the Son, only the Father. <sup>37</sup> For the Son of Man's coming will be just as it was in the days of Noach. <sup>38</sup> Back then, before the Flood, people went on eating and drinking, taking wives and becoming wives, right up till the day Noach entered the ark; <sup>39</sup> and they didn't know what was happening until the Flood came and swept them all away. It will be just like that when the Son of Man comes.*

So, the upshot is that the End Times would not arrive in the era of Haggai or Yeshua, but the people held a hope that it would. The reason for this false hope was that they didn't take the Prophets as seriously and literally as they should have, and this was because their leaders and teachers didn't either. Amazingly, that seems to be the case once again in our time, but with an ironically different outcome. Jewish and gentile worshipers of God are having a hard time believing that after so long a wait, that the End Times is right here on our horizon and so, they have ceased discerning the times. God gave us definite signs to tell us when the End Times is imminent, and the most conspicuous one is the return of Israel to their homeland as a sovereign nation. This had never before happened, and it was to be a one-time event. Because that event has happened in 1948 following WWII, then I have no hesitation to tell you that we are either in the earliest stage of the End Times or we will step over that threshold any day now.

The final verse is this:

**CJB Haggai 2:23** *<sup>23</sup> When that day comes,' says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, 'I will take you, Z'rubavel, my servant, the son of Sh'alti'el,' says ADONAI,*

***'and wear you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you,' says ADONAI-Tzva'ot."***

I think had any of us heard that from Haggai, we would have judged that Israel was soon to be rescued from Persia, become a sovereign nation again, and assume a special place as a world superpower, because it sounds like God is saying that Zerubbabel will be the man in charge when it happens.

This is the 7<sup>th</sup> time in the Book of Haggai that we find Zerubbabel's full name used. Since 7 is a sacred number that indicates an ideal number and a divinely supplied completeness, then certainly we are meant to consider Zerubbabel as a very important figure in Israel's history. But, is it he that is to be king over a revived Israelite kingdom? No; rather God says he will use Zerubbabel as His "signet". A signet was usually a ring or something attached to a chain, and would be used as that person's signature in official matters. A person who carries Yehoveh's signet therefore has Yehoveh's authority. This might sound like indeed Zerubbabel is to be that king over a revived Israelite kingdom. But, the fact is that all of Israel's kings were to be God's signets, by carrying out God's will. Zerubbabel was never more than a Persian civil servant, so while in one sense he carried God's signet, on the other this can only be the one who comes upon God's shaking of the world.

Clearly this is a Messianic and End Times person, that had to be (as was Zerubbabel) a descendant of David. Yeshua has pronounced Himself to be that descendant of David, the present Messiah and the future King over God's kingdom. Let us all pray that we are fortified in spirit and in faith, and in practical and tangible ways, in order to face that great shaking when it comes because we will not escape it except by our death. That fortification comes from obedience to God, and the code of obedience is the Law of Moses. This concludes our study of the Book of Haggai.