

Haggai 2
Sermon for August 2000
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Scripture Reading: Ezra 1:1-4; Haggai 1

Read Haggai 2

I. Introduction

In the Book of Haggai, we find the Israelites who have been allowed by Cyrus the Great of Persia to return to the Promised Land of Canaan, after about seventy years in Exile. They return to a wilderness in Judea: the land is disordered, and weeds and thorns grow in the Promised Land. These who return (a very small number compared to those who went into Exile originally), are like pioneers trying to “make it” in a land that was once “home” to their families before them.

The new foundation of the Temple is laid immediately after they return in ca. 539, but because of the everyday problems of survival the Israelites are forced to face, and opposition from those peoples around them, the building of the Temple is stalled and the Israelites have grown complacent. Thus, God in his grace, raises up two prophets: Zechariah and Haggai in 520 BC to address the people’s spiritual complacency. God also raises up the great Darius I of Persia, who is used by God to allow the post-exilic people to continue to build their temple, despite the problems still surrounding the region of Judah. From the time of the new start of building the temple, Haggai the Prophet gives four oracles to Israel, dated precisely between August and December 520 BC. The reason for his prophecies or oracles of Haggai was because despite the fact that Darius ensured the people the Temple would be built with no more opposition, the people had grown weary and satisfied with the *status quo* during this time. They needed to be encouraged to continue building God’s Kingdom House as his covenant people.

Haggai was a prophet who had originally gone into the Babylonian Exile, returned to help lay the foundation of the Temple in 539, and now he is a very old man. His task from God: to encourage hope to the Israelites in spite of their complacency and grief. Haggai is raised up to encourage the

Israelites that God is faithful to all the promises he made prior to, and during the exile through the prophets, particularly the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The promises that encouraged them that the Temple would be rebuilt as described in Ezekiel, chapters 40-48; God would once again dwell with his people as told in Ezekiel 48; God would restore the land fully as promised in Isaiah chapters 40-66; the remnant would be given new hearts and their hearts would be circumcised as prophesied and promised in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36! But this had not yet fully happened [Repeat]. All the fortunes of Israel had yet to be fully restored! The prophetic task of Haggai by God's Spirit was to encourage them to continue building and preparing for the promises of the LORD in spite of how things seemed. He is the prophet *par excellence* between promise and fulfillment. The promises of God had been made, but all the fulfillments had yet come to pass. They needed hope as they awaited the fulfillment of God's promises, and God in his grace provided through the Prophet Haggai. Simply put, Haggai was the prophet between promise and fulfillment and restoration- - and full restoration of God's people! Remember, the Exile of the Israelites from the land was because of their sins and idolatry against God as 2 Kings 17 teaches us. Now, God had allowed a remnant preserved by his grace, to return to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!

Now, we shall briefly consider the first chapter of Haggai. The basic message is "Repent and Build the temple"! Regardless of how the situation seems, the Israelites are to place God first in their lives by getting busy in temple construction (remember the Temple had been razed to the ground by King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC). Haggai tells the Israelites to consider their lot and notice that the curses of Deuteronomy, chapters 27-28 are effecting their land and labor.

Look at 1:4-11:

4 "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple *to lie* in ruins?"

5 Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!

6 "You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages *to put* into a bag with holes."

7 Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!

8 "Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD.

9 "You looked for much, but indeed *it came to* little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the LORD of hosts. "Because of My house that *is in* ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house.

10 "Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit.

11 "For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of *your* hands."

What they needed most, before any concerns about their farms and families was to “seek first the Kingdom and its righteousness and all other things would be added unto them.” They needed the Temple, the presence of God to dwell in their midst and would need to be a “Spirit-led” community and not be led so much by their own “greeds” and hopes. In 1:12, Zerubbabel and Joshua, along with all the restoration remnant repent- - by obeying God’s word. Then God uses covenantal language to assure them of his favor to them in Haggai 1:13: “I am with you.” God had not forgotten his covenant and remnant people but they needed to be busy working not so much for themselves, but busy in the LORD’s vineyard. In 1:14, the LORD stirs up the leaders Zerubbabel and Joshua and all the remnant by his Sovereign grace and goodness.

Before we look together at chapter 2, let us look at the form of the Book of Haggai. There are four oracles or prophecies that Haggai communicates to the people by the inspiration of God’s Spirit. The first oracle is in chapter one (which we just reviewed) in 1:1-15, and addressed to Zerubbabel and Joshua (the Zadokite Priest- -same Joshua found in the Book of Zechariah). The second, third and fourth oracle we will study together tonight. The second oracle is 2:1-9, addressed to Zerubbabel and Joshua; the third oracle is 2:10-19, addressed to the priests of Israel; the fourth oracle is 2:20-23, the promise to Zerubbabel the leader of the returned exiles, from the line of Judah and David.

II. Sermon

Look at chapter 2, verses 1-3:

Haggai 2:1 In the seventh *month*, on the twenty-first of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying:

2 "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying:

3 "Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, *is this* not in your eyes as nothing?"

In Haggai 2:1-3, Haggai tells them to consider the new temple being built in comparison to the old. He compares it to the former great Temple of Solomon that had been destroyed, because he wants them to have a retrospective glance at the promises and the fulfillment of all the LORD's work. We must remember that just as God fulfilled his promises to David concerning the first Temple built by his son Solomon, so God will be faithful to his promises to this remnant people by allowing them to rebuild God's temple. The present temple brought discouragement to the people, this did not seem like the magnificent temple that was described by Ezekiel to the exile community in Ezekiel 40-48. In fact, the current temple in comparison to Solomon's and Ezekiel's Temple looks pitiful. Ezra 3:12 describes the people wailing and weeping at the new temple compared to the old. The new temple was a "shack" compared to its former glory before the Babylonians destroyed it. The people were losing faith and becoming discouraged, they needed hope...but look at verses 4-9. The people may compare the outward glory of the Temple, but their trust should be in the promises of God and his faithfulness to them as covenant people.

Look at verses 4-9:

4 'Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,' says the LORD; 'and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,' says the LORD, 'and work; for I *am* with you,' says the LORD of hosts.

5 '*According to* the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!'

6 " For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it *is* a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land;

7 '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.

8 'The silver *is* Mine, and the gold *is* Mine,' says the LORD of hosts.

9 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts."

In Haggai 2:4-9, the prophet encourages the people with covenantal language of God's faithfulness. Haggai speaks to the remnant in language that would remind them of God's promises because he has elected and covenanted with his people. He uses the phrases: "Be strong"; "I am

with you”; “My Spirit remains among you”; “Do not fear”; “I will shake the heaven and the earth, etc”; “I will fill this temple with glory”; “In this place I will give peace”.

The first thing Haggai says to them is to “take courage” or literally “be strong” in verse 4. This imperative to “be strong” is the same command that the LORD gave to Joshua in the Book of Joshua, chapter 1, verses 6, 7, 9, and 19 (v.6: “Be strong and of good courage; for you shall cause this people to inherit the land which I swore to their fathers to give them”; v.9: “Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”). The covenant people needed to know that the LORD, in spite of how life seems at the moment, is indeed with them, and will keep his promises. Remember, “be strong” and “fear not” are the words of promise because of the covenant God has made with his people.

Look at verse 5:

5 *'According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!*

Haggai also points the people’s attention back in redemptive-history, to the most significant event in their history with the words “fear not”. Remember in the Exodus from Egypt:

Exodus 14:13 And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again.

Exodus 20:20 And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin."

Remember, prior to Moses’ death as the Israelites are about to enter the Promised Land under Joshua’s leadership, so now Haggai uses language that would remind them of this as well. The remnant was not only to remember the great Exodus from Egypt but the faithfulness of God in their initial taking of the promised land. Deuteronomy 31:6 Be strong and of good courage, do not fear or be in dread of them: for it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you."

And, recall the prophecy of Zechariah, the contemporary of Haggai, who says:

Zechariah 8:13 And as you have been a byword of cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you and you shall be a blessing. Fear not, but let your hands be strong."

From Governor Zerubbabel, to Priest Joshua, to all the people of the land- - they are to “take courage” and “fear not” because God is with them. God says, “I am with you”. This is the 2nd time

God has promised this (the 1st time was in chapter 1 when the people repented and began working). Also, in verse 5, the prophet gives the people a backward or retrospective glance at the great redemptive event of the Exodus, when God showed his great favor to his people after over four hundred years of bondage in slavery. If God could do it then in the Exodus, if he could and would keep his covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in spite of the Babylonian exile, he would do it again by his grace.

The LORD says through Haggai: “My Spirit is with you”, like in the Exodus and in the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites prior to coming into the Promised Land, so God’s Spirit is presently with them as well assuring them of God’s faithfulness. As well, this is God’s Spirit who would raise them up like the dead, rotting bones that Ezekiel prophesied of in Ezekiel 37. God will raise them up again as a people by his Spirit. This would lead the Israelites to their chief goal: to worship the LORD in his presence in the Temple.

Now look at verses 6-9, particularly verse 7:

6 " For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it *is* a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land;

7 '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.

8 'The silver *is* Mine, and the gold *is* Mine,' says the LORD of hosts.

9 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts."

We want to briefly consider Haggai 2:7. The context of verses 6-9 is the shaking of the earth in God’s redemption of his people- “Desire of the Nations”- has had various translations. [*Read Various Translations*]

KJV Haggai 2:7 And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.

ASV Haggai 2:7 and I will shake all nations; and the precious things of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith Jehovah of hosts.

RSV Haggai 2:7 and I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the LORD of hosts.

NKJ Haggai 2:7 '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 could be a *Messianic prediction*, but because of context, I would rather the ASV or RSV's translation: Lit. "I will shake the nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in..." The word for *desire* is *kehem-dav*. The context is about filling God's house with treasure. If you translate it "desire" (as a noun) that is all right also, but I do not think this is referring to a person such as Messiah because of the context and meaning of the word in Hebrew. The debate is over whether this is used as an adjective for the vessels of the temple as in 2 Chr. 36 or a noun as it is also used in places such as 1 Samuel 9, speaking of Saul or in Daniel 11. Regardless, we do not want to be dogmatic about the meaning here - -and we definitely want to check the context. A word such as this one does not always mean or refer to the same thing in Scripture- - context is our guide when words are used differently.

The context is speaking of articles or vessels in the temple. We have uses of the same word elsewhere, particularly when the Scriptures speak of the *precious* vessels that King Nebuchadnezzar took from the Temple in Judah. Therefore, I interpret this to mean that Haggai is promising the people that all of the vessels, that is, the "desires of the nations" will be brought into God's temple in the last days. The context is speaking of God's ownership of even the riches of pagan kingdoms. The reason for discussing this was to clarify the meaning of this verse.

Now let us look in verses 8-9, there is a promise of a new Temple. Regardless of how the situation or the new temple looks (small in comparison to Solomon's great temple), God will rebuild his house- -the LORD calls the Temple "my house." It will be even greater than Solomon's Temple if they can truly believe it. Again, the Israelites live between the promises and the fulfillment's by the LORD. This is a forward-looking or prospective glance that Haggai is prophesying to them. He is saying to keep looking not at the how things seem, but assess the situation from God's point of view- - from the fact that God truly does keep his promises to his people! God's promises keeping to us often goes beyond what we could ever imagine or even deserve.

You might sum up Haggai's message in 2:1-9: "People of God, remember God's covenantal words to you: 'fear not' - -'I am with you'. God's promises will be fulfilled in his Sovereign time. Meanwhile, live repentantly building God's temple, doing his will from the heart! Do not look at the mere outward circumstances, but look to God and his covenantal promises!"

Look at 2:10-19:

10 On the twenty-fourth *day* of the ninth *month*, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying,

11 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Now, ask the priests *concerning the law*, saying,

12 "If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?" ' " Then the priests answered and said, "No."

13 And Haggai said, "If *one who is unclean because of a dead body* touches any of these, will it be unclean?" So the priests answered and said, "It shall be unclean."

14 Then Haggai answered and said, " 'So is this people, and so is this nation before Me,' says the LORD, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.

15 ' And now, carefully consider from this day forward: from before stone was laid upon stone in the temple of the LORD --

16 'since those *days*, when *one* came to a heap of twenty ephahs, there were *but* ten; when *one* came to the wine vat to draw out fifty baths from the press, there were *but* twenty.

17 'I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not *turn* to Me,' says the LORD.

18 'Consider now from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid -- consider it:

19 'Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded *fruit*. *But* from this day I will bless *you*.' "

In Haggai 2:10-14, the prophet teaches the Israelites that even with the new temple, holiness is not contagious; they will need to be made clean to truly and properly worship God in Spirit and truth. Notice the way these questions are asked in verses 12-14:

[12 "If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?" ' " Then the priests answered and said, "No."

13 And Haggai said, "If *one who is unclean because of a dead body* touches any of these, will it be unclean?" So the priests answered and said, "It shall be unclean."

14 Then Haggai answered and said, " 'So is this people, and so is this nation before Me,' says the LORD, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.].

This teaches them that holiness is not contagious- - it comes only from God, but uncleanness and impurity is contagious and comes from sin. The LORD even uses the term "this people" instead of "my people" because of their need to be purified and to become truly a holy nation and a chosen priesthood.

In Haggai 2:15-17, the prophet again points the people's eyes forward with a prospective, continuing promise to them. He says concerning their future hopes of "what will come to pass." God is still faithful, even if his people are not. In the last part of verse 17, the LORD says I send upon you the curses of Deuteronomy, yet you did not turn to me in repentance. However, by the LORD's grace he will be faithful to cleanse and purify them for service as Zechariah 3 teaches us in Zech. 3:9 that says: "I will remove the iniquity from the land in one day."

In Haggai 2:18-19, the LORD points his people in the direction of the future and his grace to them. He says “From this day onward...” - - blessings! This “from this day” (lit. translated: “from this day upward, onward, or forward) is a familiar prophetic motif that means in the “last days”. The phrase is important in the prophets for understanding the full restoration of God’s people and all of God’s promises. In Ezekiel 39:22-29, after Ezekiel has prophesied to the Israelites concerning the Exile, he prophesies hope to them as Haggai does here. Ezekiel says:

22 "So the house of Israel shall know that I *am* the LORD their God from that day forward.

23 "The Gentiles shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity; because they were unfaithful to Me, therefore I hid My face from them. I gave them into the hand of their enemies, and they all fell by the sword.

24 "According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I have dealt with them, and hidden My face from them." "

25 " 'Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Now I will bring back the captives of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name --

26 'after they have borne their shame, and all their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, when they dwelt safely in their *own* land and no one made *them* afraid.

27 'When I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and I am hallowed in them in the sight of many nations,

28 'then they shall know that I *am* the LORD their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also brought them back to their land, and left none of them captive any longer.

29 'And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel,' says the Lord GOD.

In Haggai’s prophecy, the LORD wants his people to know that in the interim, the time between promise and fulfillment, that their hope is in the God who has delivered them in the past, is with them in the present, and will fulfill all his promises to them in the future! These blessings are the Deuteronomic blessings promised through Moses long ago. What is implicit is just what the LORD had promised in Deuteronomy 30, and reminded them through the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, both before and during the Exile, that he would circumcise the hearts of the people so that they could and would keep covenant with their God. The hope of the remnant is that they will be a covenant-keeping people with God in their midst. The obedience of the people in building the Temple is because of God’s sovereign grace in restoring some- - the remnant- - from Exile! The Spirit’s work among the people and the success of their work depend all on God’s grace working among and in the people. The building of the Temple is because God is truly gracious, in spite of

the complacency and sins of his people. He will use them to build his Temple- - he will dwell among them- - and he will cleanse and purify them from their sins. All of grace- - even in the OT!

Look at verses 20-23:

20 And again the word of the LORD came to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying,
 21 "Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying: 'I will shake heaven and earth.
 22 I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I will destroy the strength of the Gentile kingdoms. I will overthrow the chariots And those who ride in them; The horses and their riders shall come down, Every one by the sword of his brother.
 23 'In that day,' says the LORD of hosts, 'I will take you, Zerubbabel My servant, the son of Shealtiel,' says the LORD, 'and will make you like a signet *ring*; for I have chosen you,' says the LORD of hosts."

At the end of chapter 2, in verses 20-23, we notice that God promises his people what he will do. Specifically, four very important things that will happen “from this day onward.” (1) the LORD will shake the heavens and the earth; (2) He will overthrow the throne of all kingdoms (all that oppress and rule over the Israelites); (3) He will overthrow chariots, because he will bring about a *new Exodus*; and (4) He will restore the Davidic King like Zerubbabel. That is, God will make Zerubbabel his signet ring because of his love for his people. God promises in verse 23: “I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you.” The great significance to this last promise should be understood in light of Jeremiah 22:24-30:

24 " *As* I live," says the LORD, "though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet on My right hand, yet I would pluck you off;
 25 "and I will give you into the hand of those who seek your life, and into the hand *of those* whose face you fear -- the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the hand of the Chaldeans.
 26 "So I will cast you out, and your mother who bore you, into another country where you were not born; and there you shall die.
 27 "But to the land to which they desire to return, there they shall not return.
 28 "Is this man Coniah a despised, broken idol -- A vessel in which *is* no pleasure? Why are they cast out, he and his descendants, And cast into a land which they do not know?
 29 O earth, earth, earth, Hear the word of the LORD!
 30 Thus says the LORD: 'Write this man down as childless, A man *who* shall not prosper in his days; For none of his descendants shall prosper, Sitting on the throne of David, And ruling anymore in Judah.' "

Because of the sins of Judah, the LORD had prophesied through Jeremiah that there was no hope for the continuance of a king in Judah. However, now because of God’s grace and his covenantal promises to David, we see Haggai promising the people that he will make Zerubbabel

(from the tribe of Judah) God's signet ring once more. What grace! Because of the truths that God reveals through Haggai the Prophet in the present, the people of God are to "watch"- - persevere with loyalty to their great God and Savior. Despite how "things seem" they are to rebuild the temple and continue to watch for their LORD to return to them by his presence. They are to be a worshipping community awaiting the full return of their great God! But because the promises of God sometimes seemed to never be fulfilled, they cried out oftentimes: "How long O Lord, before your return and restore all things?" "How long before you fully fulfill all your promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and continued through the prophets?"

The hope of the people of God is that in the fullness of time, Christ came, one who was greater than Zerubbabel and from his line as the greater Davidic King according to Matthew's genealogy. Jesus was the greater and more glorious Temple of God. The temple in the OT pointed forward to Christ as the place where God dwelled with his people, but the Apostle John teaches us in chapter one of his gospel: the Word became flesh and tabernacled or dwelt among us, we have seen his glory the glory of the only begotten Son of God. Christ is the cornerstone of the new Temple, by his Spirit—whether Jew or Gentile- - there is a new priesthood, holy nation, new temple.

In Hebrews 12, the author speaks of the "shaking of the heavens and the earth" that has occurred in the Last Days because of Christ (Heb. 12: 18-29). Christ delivered us from the bondage of sin as in the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt that Haggai reminded them of and he is now ruling over all the nations! Christ fulfilled covenant as the True Remnant and Servant of YHWH- -the blessings of Deuteronomy are expanded to all those who will be with Christ in the New Jerusalem- - the Promised Land of the New Heavens and the New Earth as Isaiah prophesied in chapter 66. In Christ, the LORD has brought in his Kingdom and he shaken the heavens and the earth in Christ's work on behalf of his people in his resurrection from the dead. Christ has overthrown the throne of all kingdoms because the LORD has placed all authority under his feet. Christ has brought about a new and final exodus as he redeems his people by his work and rescues them from the Kingdom of darkness and defeats the reign of sin, death and the devil. Christ, from the line of Zerubbabel sits at

the right hand of God. Christ is our hope. But for us in the church, as a restored New Covenant community, we do not see all of God's promises fulfilled and the full restoration of the New Heavens and the New Earth.

III. Conclusion

We also today, cry out: "How long O Lord" before you return? We ourselves as a church are a people who live between the promises of God and the fulfillment's of those promises. Oftentimes we become disheartened and complacent concerning God's promises. As a church, we live between Christ's fulfillment of the covenant and the awaiting- - the anticipations of the renewal of all things! How do we keep busy doing the LORD's will and to be balanced in our work here in the church and our longing for the return of our Lord Jesus? How often do we become complacent about the Christian life when God's promises are not fulfilled as quickly as we expect them? This is nothing new, all of the people of God through every millennium have experienced this problem. The problem of how to be expectant but at the same time busy about doing God's will in this world.

In the history of the church, there has been an expectancy of the LORD's fulfilling all of his promises in Christ's return. There have been many reasons since the time of Christ's ascension that have caused the people of God to grow complacent in their service. One such tendency is to be overly focused on the future and not standing firm, busy building the Kingdom of God in the present. For example, one of the many problems of the 19th century was a movement in Christianity called the *Prophetic Conference Movement*. These conferences invited "prominent teachers" who promised Christ's return with many "convincing" proofs and arguments supposedly taken from the Bible. However, when Jesus did not roll up the four corners of heaven as the preachers predicted, the people of God became disheartened - -sick in their expectant hearts. Because of these prophetic conferences of the 19th century, many well-meaning Christians were destroyed, dismayed and devastated as a people; their hopes shattered. Because Jesus did not return as anticipated and expected, many quit the churches and removed themselves to their own private "religious worlds and

monasteries". Because of the abuse of some of these teachers who falsely predicted Jesus' return, the people of God were left very worldly and complacent in character.

Now there is absolutely no denying that Christ will return, this is one of the essentials of the Christian faith. However, throughout church history, well-meaning Christian preachers have tried to precisely predict when Christ will return, and have disillusioned God's people. Perhaps these preachers meant well in their ministries, but they certainly had no business darkening the pulpit of Christ's church! According to 2 Peter, those who practice such things are unfortunately weak and ignorant men, whether they predict the "month," the "hour," the "minute" or the "second" - they were abusing God's pulpit for their own false interpretation by the twisting of Scripture. The times between promise and fulfillment are difficult enough, the people of God do not need additional setbacks to keep their hopes alive and future-oriented!

Haggai's task as prophet and preacher was not to predict or give false hopes to the Israelites after the exile, but to keep the people of God doing what it was God called had them to do. Haggai was to rightly interpret the present and continue the hope of God's people into the future, not to give the people false hopes. As it was for Haggai, so this is the task of faithful preachers today. Preachers today must continue to assess the present in light of God's plan, and to encourage the people that God will fulfill and be faithful to his covenant promises.

God's people need to be encouraged from, and out of the tendency of complacency. It is the preacher's job, like Haggai before them, to provide "oil" for the bride's lamps, not false hopes, that lead to despair. The so-called prophecy experts of the 19th century were crossing boundaries as servants in Christ's church and trying to plumb the Sovereign, unknowable mind of the Triune God! They were ultimately keeping God's people from what *he had revealed* in Scripture, by pointing the people's attention on what God *had not revealed* - even to his own beloved Son! Now we should forgive these preachers of the past, especially since they seem so distant from us today, but we should not forget that we can easily become complacent in the Christian life and we do not need

false hopes, but a sustained hope that is derived from God's promises in Scripture, and which are stood upon and firmly established by the faithful preacher week after week in Christ's Church!

Remember, according to the Book of Hebrews, we are described as a wilderness generation and people as the church. We must watch for the fulfillment of all of God's promises and the hope that we have in Christ. That is, we must fix our eyes on the Author and Pioneer-Perfector of our faith! True faith for the Christian today is indeed the things not seen- - but we must be prepared as Christ told his disciples many times prior to his going to God's right hand.

The people of God living in the last days, must have right hopes and expectations as we await our Sovereign Lord and Bridegroom. But as the prophet Haggai taught, we must "work and worship"- - not over expecting or over anticipating a "future kingdom" but to be about building the Kingdom he has already revealed in the visible church! In other words, we are not to be merely *waiting expectantly* for Christ, but we are to be *working expectantly* for Christ- - working in Christ's visible church- - his Kingdom.

If you have grown complacent, if you have packed your bags and sat at the side of the road waiting for Jesus Christ – you need to hear both the words of instruction and encouragement of Haggai: "Get busy for the Kingdom" visibly manifested in Christ's church, and be encouraged that God will indeed fulfill all of his prophecies and promises in his good and Sovereign time! Do not withdraw from the work to work in your own fields, home, etc, while neglecting the work of Christ's church. Get busy building as the Spirit-indwelted Temple of God!

Our hope in Christ's coming calls for us to be builders who say "How long, O LORD" and "Come, Lord Jesus" but a right understanding of this is to stay building his church. Remember, it will be well with those the LORD finds doing his work when he returns. Those who stand firm to the end truly are those who are saved, as Jesus himself has told us.

As Haggai, and the Israelites who returned from Exile, we live between partial fulfillment of God's promises and the consummation when Christ returns. We have the first-fruits of Christ's Spirit; we have a down payment of the future - -NOW! But we await the full consummation when

Christ shall return and all of God's promises shall be fulfilled! It is interesting in Acts 1:6-11, how the disciples who are a new restoration community, prior to Christ's ascension, want the end to come right away. They ask him if it is at this time he will restore the kingdom to Israel. What we need to notice is that they are already becoming complacent and misguided as to how the promises of God will be fulfilled. Jesus answers in a way that we must not misunderstand. The better question of the Israelites would have been: Is this the time you will restore Israel to the Kingdom, not the other way around- - for the Kingdom had come in Christ. Even the apostles had immediate expectations of Old Covenant promises, just like the post-exilic community of Haggai's day. However, notice Christ's message to them, and us now! Notice how Christ, as Haggai before him, points their gaze forward. Christ says you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be witnesses to the ends of the earth! This is the essence of Haggai's message in the context of the NT. Go and by the power of Christ's Spirit, build and be witnesses to Christ's Kingdom until he returns! And in addition, as it was in Haggai, the LORD promises elsewhere in Matthew's gospel, that "Lo, I am with you always- - even to the end of this age!" Let us be about building Christ's kingdom until he returns. Let us not be complacent, not have over-realized expectations of Jesus' Kingdom being established in a way inconsistent with God's sovereign plans!

People of God: Be patient and persevere! Your hope is not in man's wisdom and ingenuity as to exactly when Christ will return. Your hope is in the God who will send Christ back to take his people to himself when he is good and ready! It may seem like the LORD is slow in keeping his promises, but remember: faith is the evidence of things hoped for, the certainty of things to come- - right now! We are indeed a Last Days community between the New covenant restoration and the full restoration of the Heavens and the Earth - -we truly live between promise and fulfillment, but we have the words and work of Christ to fully assure us that God's promises are "yes and amen" in Christ! It is true people of God- - as Haggai the prophet encouraged the Old covenant restoration- - so Christ encourages the New Covenant restoration people: "I am with you always" and so we look forward to the day when we shall be in the presence of the LORD forever! But we must wait

patiently! Remember, Revelation 21:22-17 teaches us that there will be no temple in the New Heavens and the New Earth- - this will be the ultimate fulfillment of Haggai's promises. But also remember: *Wait upon the LORD; be of good courage and he shall strengthen your hearts; wait I say on the LORD!*

Let's pray!