
The Future Blessing of the Work

Haggai 2:10-23

Introduction Who does not want the blessing of God? Seems to be a ridiculous question, doesn't it. How is it then that many people can labor without God's blessing and not see what is going on? How is it that counselee after counselee sits in my office blind to the simple fact that the severe hardships they are under are coming through the hand of God?

God's people, having returned from exile, are struggling. They have gone back to the work as God commanded through Haggai. They are clearing the rubble, gathering the materials and have laid the foundation. They know now that the present smallness of the house they are building is designed to point to a future glory. They are continuing however, to experience what seems to be hardship and blight, the decline of flock of field Why is this so? You can hear them saying, "We have picked up the ministry work. We are obeying. We are doing what we are supposed to do. Where is the blessing of God, now?" Lest we become critical of them, it is my own observation that we are not much different. Initial and immediate steps of obedience we expect an abrupt and complete reversal of hardship. Why is it that this is often not so?

John Calvin, the great pastor, Bible teacher, reformer, and clear expositor of God's Word, wrote this about our text for study.

The first [messages] condemned the sloth of the people; for, being intent on their own advantages, they all neglected the building of the Temple; and he shows that they were deservedly suffering punishment for their ingratitude; for they despised God their Deliverer, or at least honored him less than they ought to have done, and deprived him of the worship due to him. He then encouraged them to hope for a complete restoration, and showed that there was no reason for them to be disheartened by difficulties, and that though they were surrounded by enemies, and had to bear many evils, and were terrified by threatening edicts, they ought yet to have entertained hope; for the Lord would perform the work which he had begun — to restore their ancient dignity to his people, and Christ also would at length come to secure the perfect happiness and glory of the Church.¹

We have seen that God's people needed to look back and to look up. They have learned of God's glory and holiness. Now they need to look inward in self-examination and look forward in expectation.²

¹John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: Haggai*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998).

²Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Heroic*, "Personal and Group Study Guide Included"--P. 4 of Cover., An Old Testament study (Colorado Springs, Colo.: ChariotVictor Pub., 1997), 78.

A Call for Examination**Ch. 2:10-19**

Two months have passed since the last message from Haggai. It is December, now. The people are working hard. Now a startling question is being asked - Why have you gone to the work?

Challenges from the Law**(v.10-13)**

Two important questions structure this prophetic message. They are designed to get the people of Israel to examine their motives, to look at their hearts.

The first question asks, is holiness communicable? Does the holiness of sanctified meat for offering transfer to clothing, utensils, etc? The answer from the Scriptures is, no, it does not.

The second question asks, is sinfulness communicable? Does contamination and corruption of sin transfer to those in contact with it? The answer from the Scriptures is, yes, it does.

The lessons from the law are easily illustrated. How many of you have caught your good health from someone near you who has good health? None? However, how many of you have the vicious stomach flu going around from someone near you? Most? Health cannot be passed like that; but sickness can.

So, you cannot catch holiness from someone. It does not rub off. It does travel through handkerchiefs. Virtue is not communicable. But the contamination and corruption of sin is communicable. Bad company (including the 70's band) corrupts good morals – so says the wise man in Proverbs.

Contamination of the Work**(v.14)**

So, what is the point? The work is contaminated. Everything they touch and do is contaminated. They are corrupt sinners. Everything they touch, they contaminate. What they offer is unclean. This is probably *not* talking about bringing unclean sacrifices, but being an unclean people who come to do work on the house of God and end up making it unclean. So here is a commanded ministry being done by corrupt people with the effect that they contaminate the work.

Why say this to them? God is challenging their motivations for doing the work. He asking, why have you gone to the work of rebuilding the Temple? It appears that many had gone to the work expecting that being in the work and in the house of God gave them some sort of holiness. They expected that working on the house of God would transfer the holiness of the house of God to them. They had it terribly reversed. Instead of seeking to become holy by doing the work, they should have sought to be holy in order to do the work.

Terribly, instead of holiness being transmitted to them, they were contaminating the holy work they were doing. With the disease of sin, sneezing and coughing into their bare hands, they laid those sin virused hands on the work of ministry and ruined it.

Considerations in the Work

(v.15-19)

In the next bit, Haggai tells them to consider some things. This is not to be a casual look at what is going on. They are to look carefully at how God is working and think clearly about what it means. They were missing some obvious indications that something was wrong with their own lives.

Their Response to Blasting

(v.15-17)

The Lord challenges them to think about what had happened before they began the work on the Temple. How had they done? Over and over again, God blasted their productivity and prosperity. But they seemed to not connect their difficulties with their disobediences. They would not return even though God was chastening them.

Their Reward in Blessing

(v.18-19)

They also needed to think about what happened when they took up the work of building the Temple. When they laid the foundations the blessing began. God withdrew His chastening and dispensed His blessing. Israel had been taught by the Scriptures to measure the blessing of God by the bounty of God. So as they moved into the ministry work God required, He rewarded them. In this way, the Lord encourages and motivates His people.

We need to bring this to us through the cross. We still experience both the chastening and blessing of God. God deals with our disobedience. God will reward our obedience. However, God's blessings are not based on nor obtained by our obedience. God is not obligated to bless because we obey. God will sovereignly bless at the time of His choosing in the way that is best. But, make no mistake, God does reward as a motivation for engaging in the hard work of ministry. Some may say that the reward is Christ – that may be, it is a reward none the less.

This call to consider our lives we can all heed as well. We often simply keep going on doing what we do without careful examination of what God is showing us. God is in sovereign control over everything in our lives. We tend to wait till the big stuff or the bad stuff to wake up and listen up. At the center of what God is doing is your holiness and your faithfulness. Will you please Him in everything and will you do the ministry work you ought to be doing. Some of you have not found your niche. Some of you have stopped doing ministry you are gifted and able to do. Some of you are in a good transition into this community where you need to do ministry work. Are you seeing God working in your life so that you will do what He wants you to do?

In Adult Bible Education, we will be taking the summer quarter to carefully think about how God is working to transform us, to change and grow us. We will be looking at a series of texts from which we derive some models for seeing God at work. You need to be there. It will be Bible saturated, God-centered, personally intensive and deeply applicable. We will talk about your place in God's pleasure, purposes and plans. We will look at heat and dew as heart exposing of us as individuals and as a church community. Come and learn how to see God at work in your life.

A Cause for Expectation**Ch. 2:20-23**

The final word from the Lord comes also in December. It is spoken to the governor of Judah, Zerubbabel. He points this leader of God's people to the future glory of the work.

Now, we must remember that Zerubbabel is a governor. There is no king in Israel. The throne is empty. No one of David's line has ascended in pomp and circumstance to the rule and reign over Israel. All future earthly kings of Israel are usurpers. The Babylonian exile intended to empty the throne and leave it vacant. So, there is a distinct sense of loss when the government had no king. But this is not the end of the story. The Temple is being rebuilt in a way intended to point them to a future temple, the Lord Jesus Christ and the spiritual temple of His church. So, the empty throne is also intended to point them to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, their future King who would die and rise again. In His resurrection and ascension He sits on David's Throne to rule and reign. Here in this final prophetic word is real cause for a grand expectation.

The Impending Ruin**(v.20-22)**

We have heard this language before in Haggai 2:6-8. "For thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill his house with glory...'" So a mighty cataclysm is soon to happen. It will be a day when the glory will fill the Temple. It will be a day when the Lord will shake and shatter the earth and gain the victory in the midst of awful destruction.

The inauguration of the fulfillment of this prophetic word began with life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The author of Hebrews quotes these texts from Haggai when he writes:

See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. ²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." ²⁷ This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire. [Hebrews 12:25-29, ESV]

Jesus' death and resurrection began the shaking of heavens and earth that will end on the final day of His return in glory. Then, through the gospel the kingdom will begin. It will extend down through history until the end of days. In the end of days, Jesus Christ will return from heaven to complete what was begun in His first coming. Then, He will bring His redeemed people with Him from all the ages in a mighty train, in a glorious crowd from every tribe, tongue and people. He will destroy the armies of the nations. He will bring all His enemies to heel. He will set up His throne and judge. It will be a triumphant day of glory for Christ and a terrible day of calamity for all those who have refused His Word rejected His Son.

The Inaugurated Reign

(v.23)

In a marvelous reversal of God's judgment, Zerubbabel is identified to continue the Davidic line. His grandfather, Jehoiachin, had been rejected and his reign ended. But now, God affirms him.

He is identified as God's servant. In Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah, he is marked as a spiritual man who obeyed God immediately. When sin was pointed out, he repented quickly. He led God's people courage and conviction. He is God's servant. But he also points through the language of Isaiah to God's greater Servant. The Lord Jesus would come as a servant and shepherd king. He would serve His Father's purposes, even to dying a cross kind of death.

The signet ring referred to here was used to make the mark of its owner on a document or clay tablet. It reflected his authority and was to be guarded, preserved and passed on to the heirs. God promised that Zerubbabel would be his signet, or representative authority to the people. The promise related primarily to Zerubbabel's dynasty. His family line would be honored and preserved. Through Zerubbabel's lineage would come Jesus the Messiah.³ But more importantly, Zerubbabel and His Successor (singular) would be the signet ring. Jesus would receive the approval of God and place His stamp of ownership, His mark of character on all those who believe in Him. Both Zerubbabel and the Lord Jesus are the signet rings marking God's great promises to dwell among His people and rule over them. What a great thing to be the living signet ring.

Here is the close and the cause – “I have chosen you, declares the Lord of Hosts.” What God has done for Zerubbabel and for all God's people is to show the greatness and glory of God. God has chosen Zerubbabel; He has chosen His people so that no one of us may boast in His presence. Pride and place and position are all removed when it is all of God and all of God alone.

There is also honor and love and delight flowing from being chosen. We are humbled and we are honored. That God chosen us of His own will and in His own great love makes much of God. Making much of God then floods the heart with all that is grand about being loved by God.

³Robert B. Hughes and J. Carl Laney, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*, Rev. Ed. of: *New Bible Companion*. 1990.; Includes Index., The Tyndale reference library (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 373.

As we close, allow these truths to settle deep in your soul in a life transforming way. **Conclusion**

Evaluate your life carefully to see God at work. What is He doing? Where is He chastening? How is He blessing? Over what in your life is He frowning? Over what does He smile happily?

Do your work of ministry. At the end of the day, this is what Haggai calls us to. He frames that work as building up the house of God, His people. There is much support to ministry that needs to be done and done by people with Spirit-given ability and grace enabled strength. Many of you may well be under the heavy hand of God because you are not engaged in true ministry work.

Know that what we do here may always be small and incomplete. We are doing a great and good and glorious work, this building up of God's people. But we will never finish it ourselves. It will never be as perfect as we hope and plan. But it is God's good work for us.

Set your expectation on what God promises in the future. Look forward to final consummation of this age and the coming the fullness of His kingdom. Be willing to work hard for what will only be complete on the day of glory. Set your hope and expectation on that in such a way that you are moved and motivated to do ministry work now.

God will bring about victory and to show His glory in us. Let us, then, get to the work.