

September 26

Haggai 1-2
Zechariah 1

Welcome with your accelerator for Sept 26th I'm Chad Reelfs and I serve on the board. I'm in beautiful Seattle.

Early traditions tell us that Haggai was a priest who like Ezekiel before him, also became a prophet. The tradition says that when he died he was buried with great honor near the other priests, but whether or not he was a priest, he was clearly a preacher of great power.

We learned yesterday that in 536 BC shortly after they had arrived back in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel led the returnees in a ceremony to lay the new foundation for the temple and after the death of Cyrus, opposition from the Samaritans and others in the Trans-Euphrates province, caused the work to be discontinued. In fact, so little was achieved that when Haggai, Zechariah and Zerubbabel managed to get the work going again in 520 BC, they had to have another foundation laying ceremony and begin the work again.

The Book of Haggai contains the sermons that God used to motivate the people to resume the work again. These sermons were given between August and December of the year 520 BC.

What we may in fact be reading here are the prophet's own sermon notes strung together by an editor who gives us the background and setting of Haggai's sermons.

There are four messages in the little Book of Haggai and each one begins with exactly the same introduction: "The word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai ..."

In the first sermon Haggai tells the people that all of their priorities are all wrong. Harvests have been meager, droughts have been frequent, and instead of building the temple, they were spending their energy and money on themselves building "paneled houses" and trying to care for their own needs.

"You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little!" That is God's assessment. The people responded to the message and fired themselves to work and God sent a follow-up message: "I am with you." When we get our priorities straight, we always hear God say, "I am with you."

In the second sermon, the work is taking some significant shape but some of the old ones are discouraged because it is clear that this new temple will not compare in majesty and glory to the temple of Solomon that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed.

God's word to them is be strong. I am with you. My Spirit remains among you. Do not fear. Don't worry, he is saying, about the lack of silver and gold.. I own all of the silver and gold and in a little while I will shake the nations and "the desired of all nations shall come and I will fill this house with my glory."

That sounds like a Messianic prophecy that points toward the time of Ezekiel's latter day glory. It is true, however, that the prophecy may be seen as being literally fulfilled when Jesus Christ, who is the glory of God, came to the temple. His glory was veiled then but the desired of the ages did come to His temple.

The third message again explains why the fullness of God's blessing has been withheld from His people. Their unwillingness to obey God in the rebuilding of the temple has kept Him from blessing them, but now that they have given themselves to the task wholeheartedly, He says, "From this day on I will bless you." When we wholeheartedly give our selves to see his blessing.

The fourth message is directed not to the nation, but to Zerubbabel himself and it is the most problematic part of the Book of Haggai because though Zerubbabel did in fact come to be a great hero in the eyes of Israel because of his service in rebuilding the temple, the words seem to imply a new phase of world history.

Zerubbabel's importance in the history of Judah can hardly be overestimated; he is listed along with Joshua as one of the most important fathers of Israel.

This book is extremely relevant to us today. We live in a time were God's people have misplaced their priorities. The people of Judah certainly believed that rebuilding the temple was a worthy project. They would even have testified to its importance -- its vital importance. It is just that until Haggai began to preach, they didn't see the task an urgent one. That happens with us. The problem in Judah was not one of wickedness.

They weren't doing horrible things. All they were doing was putting their own personal and family interests above the work of God and that was the thing that they were being rebuked.

Put God's work first, Haggai shouts. If you do you will be sure to receive His blessings on your life. Don't give Him the leftovers of your time and money. Give Him the first part, the best part and if you do, you will find Him always ready to bless you in ways that you will not be able to anticipate. Now you tell me, isn't that the very message we need to hear today?