LIFE-STUDY OF HAGGAI

MESSAGE ONE

THE BUILDING OF THE HOUSE OF JEHOVAH IN RELATION TO ISRAEL'S WELFARE AND MESSIAH'S COMING

Scripture Reading: Hag. 1—2

In this message we will cover the book of Haggai, a book that is concerned with the building of the house of Jehovah in relation to Israel's welfare and Messiah's coming.

I. THE INTRODUCTORY WORD

Haggai 1:1 is the introductory word.

A. The Meaning of the Name Haggai

The name Haggai in Hebrew means "My feast" or "the feast of Jehovah," signifying that Haggai the prophet, who had been born in captivity in Babylon, expected earnestly to return from the captivity that the feasts of Jehovah might be restored.

B. The Time of Haggai's Ministry

The time of Haggai's ministry was 520 B.C., at the time of Zechariah (Ezra 5:1).

C. The Place of His Ministry

The place of his ministry was Jerusalem.

D. The Object of His Ministry

The object of his ministry was the returned Israelites.

E. The Subject

The subject of the prophecy of Haggai is Jehovah's dealing with the returned captives for the building of His house.

F. The Central Thought

The central thought of the book of Haggai is that the building of the house of Jehovah is related to the welfare of God's people today and to the coming of the millennial kingdom with its Messiah in the age of restoration. In the Old Testament the house of God, or the temple, was a type first of Christ as the house of God individually, and then of the church, the Body, the enlarged Christ, as God's house corporately. Thus, we should consider that Haggai refers to us, since we are the reality of the type. Jehovah's dealing with the returned captives signifies His dealing with us in the recovery.

G. The Revelation concerning Christ

The revelation concerning Christ in the book of Haggai covers two matters.

1. Christ's Being the Desire of All the Nations

First, this book reveals Christ in His being the Desire of all the nations (2:7).

2. Christ's Coming as the Messiah in the Coming Age

Second, this book reveals Christ in His coming as the Messiah (typified by Zerubbabel the governor) in the coming age (2:23).

H. The Sections

Haggai has three sections: the introductory word (1:1); Jehovah's rebuke and charge concerning the delay of the building of His house (1:2-15); and the prophecy concerning the house of Jehovah in the millennium and the promise of Messiah in the coming kingdom (2:1-23).

II. JEHOVAH'S REBUKE AND CHARGE CONCERNING THE DELAY OF THE BUILDING OF HIS HOUSE

A. Jehovah's Rebuke

In 1:2-6, 9-11 we have Jehovah's rebuke.

1. The People's Excuse

"Thus says Jehovah of hosts, saying, This people says, The time has not come, the time for the house of Jehovah to be built" (v. 2). Here we have the people's excuse for delaying to rebuild the house of Jehovah. Their excuse was the time had not yet come for the house of Jehovah to be built.

2. Jehovah's Question

The people's excuse is followed by Jehovah's question. "Then the word of Jehovah came through Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled up houses, while this house lies waste?" (vv. 3-4). They were taking care of their houses but not Jehovah's house, so He came in to ask them concerning His house.

3. Jehovah's Dealing with the Self-caring and God-neglecting Returned Captives

In verses 5, 6, and 9 through 11 we have Jehovah's dealing with the self-caring and God-neglecting returned captives.

a. Charging Them to Consider Their Ways

In His dealing, the first thing Jehovah did was to charge the people to consider their ways (v. 5).

b. Telling Them That They Had Sown Much but Had Brought in Little

Jehovah pointed out that the returned captives had sown much but had brought in little; that they had eaten and drunk but without satisfaction; that they had clothed themselves but without being warmed; and that they had earned wages to put them into a bag with holes (v. 6). This tells us that if we do not have the heart to take care of God's house for His satisfaction, no matter how much we eat or drink or how well

we dress ourselves, there will be no satisfaction. If we neglect the church, we will have no real enjoyment or satisfaction.

c. Saying That They Looked for Much and It Amounted to Little

In verse 9 Jehovah went on to say that they looked for much, and it amounted to little. When they brought it home, He blew on it because of His house which lay waste, and they each ran to their own house. Therefore, over them the heavens withheld their dew, and the earth withheld its yield (v. 10). Indeed, Jehovah had called for a drought upon the land, upon the mountains, upon the grain, upon the new wine, upon the fresh oil, upon that which the ground brings forth, and upon man, beast, and all the toil of the hands (v. 11).

The word "run" in verse 9 indicates that the people were busy caring for their own houses. Today some saints are so busy caring for their own houses that they have no time to attend the meetings. As we consider this, we need to realize that in the entire universe there is no such thing as neutrality. We must be absolute. We must either take care of our houses first or take care of the Lord's house first. My point here is that we need to learn to save some time for the Lord's interests. How many sinners are waiting for our visitation? How many saints, especially younger ones, are waiting for our cherishing and nourishing? We may excuse ourselves today, but we need to consider how we will answer the Lord Jesus when He comes. We may have many relatives who are unsaved. Their being unsaved may be our fault, not theirs. If so, when the Lord comes to settle accounts with us (Matt. 25:19), He will surely rebuke us. It has been difficult for us to get the increase, not mainly because of our environment but because of our excuses.

B. Jehovah's Charge

In His charge Jehovah told the people to consider their ways and to go up to the mountain and bring wood and build the house, and He would take pleasure in it and would be glorified (Hag. 1:7-8). Today our gospel preaching is our gathering of material for the building of God's house.

C. The People's Response

Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest and all the remnant of the people responded to Jehovah by listening to the voice of Jehovah their God and to the words of Haggai the prophet, and they were in fear before Jehovah (v. 12). Then Haggai, Jehovah's messenger, encouraged the people with Jehovah's declaration, "I am with you" (v. 13). Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, the spirit of Joshua, and the spirit of all the people, and they came and did work in the house of Jehovah of hosts (vv. 14-15). What a wonderful response!

I hope that all the dear saints will be busy in going out to visit people and in contacting their relatives, classmates, and colleagues for the gospel. All the saints should be occupied by the Lord Jesus in preaching the gospel, feeding the new believers, and taking care of others. I hope that concerning this the whole atmosphere and environment among us will be revolutionized.

III. THE PROPHECY CONCERNING THE HOUSE OF JEHOVAH IN THE MILLENNIUM AND THE PROMISE OF MESSIAH IN THE COMING KINGDOM

Haggai 2:1-23 is the prophecy concerning the house of Jehovah in the millennium and the promise of Messiah in the coming kingdom.

A. The Prophecy concerning the House of Jehovah in the Millennium, as an Encouragement to the Building of Jehovah's House at Zerubbabel's Time

In verses 1 through 9 the prophet Haggai was charged to speak to the people concerning the house of Jehovah. "For thus says Jehovah of hosts, Yet once more—it is but a little while—I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, and the Desire of all the nations will come; and I will fill this house with glory, says Jehovah of hosts. The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, declares Jehovah of hosts. The latter glory of

this house will be greater than the former, says Jehovah of hosts; and in this place I will give peace, declares Jehovah of hosts" (vv. 6-9). This prophecy concerning the house of Jehovah in the millennium was an encouragement to the building of Jehovah's house at Zerubbabel's time.

Verse 7 reveals that Christ is the Desire of all the nations. I appreciate the line in Charles Wesley's hymn that says, "Come, Desire of nations, come!" Christ truly is the desire of all mankind. All people desire to have life, light, peace, goodness, and righteousness, yet they do not realize that what they desire is really Christ. Christ is life, light, and peace. If we do not have Him, we do not have life, light, peace, or any of the human virtues. Christ is the reality of every human virtue. Thus, to desire virtue actually is to desire Christ.

According to God's arrangement in His creation of man, the human virtues, such as love, kindness, patience, and humility, are for the expression of the divine attributes. It is God's intention that the attributes of His being would be expressed by man in his virtues. As an illustration of this, consider a glove that is designed in the form of a human hand. The hand is the content of the glove, and the glove is the expression of the hand. Likewise, the human virtues are the "glove" for the expression of the divine attributes as the "hand." Just as a glove without a hand has no content, so the human virtues without the divine attributes have no reality.

Genesis 1:26 tells us that God made man in His own image and according to His likeness. Nevertheless, man was empty, having only the outward form but not having God as his inward content. God intended, therefore, that the man created in His image would exercise his will to choose God, signified by the tree of life, as his content. To choose God in this way means that we receive God's life with His attributes into us to be expressed through us by our virtues. For example, one of God's attributes is love. We may say that this love is part of the "hand" and that our human virtue of love is part of the "glove." Even unbelievers have a natural, human love. Of course, they do not have the divine attribute of love. As believers, we have received God as our life, and as He lives

within us, His attribute of love is expressed through the virtue of our human love. In this way, Christ becomes the reality of this human virtue.

Today people everywhere desire life, light, love, patience, and endurance without realizing that to desire these virtues is actually to desire Christ. All people, including unbelievers, desire Christ unconsciously. This is what it means to say that Christ is the Desire of all the nations.

B. The People's Uncleanness and Jehovah's Dealing with Them and Then Blessing Them

In verses 10 through 19 the prophet spoke about the people's uncleanness and Jehovah's dealing with them and then blessing them. The uncleanness here was not physical but moral and spiritual, involving their relationship with God. Once the uncleanness was removed, they would be blessed by God.

C. The Promise of Messiah in the Coming Kingdom

Finally, in verses 20 through 23 we have the promise of Messiah (typified by Zerubbabel) in the coming kingdom. Haggai was charged to speak to Zerubbabel, saying, "I will shake the heavens and the earth. And I will overthrow the throne of the kingdoms and will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down, each by the sword of his brother. In that day, declares Jehovah of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant, declares Jehovah, and make you as a signet ring; for I have chosen you, declares Jehovah of hosts" (vv. 21-23). Jehovah's making Zerubbabel as a signet ring indicates that Jehovah regarded him as His representative and that He loved him and trusted him. Zerubbabel was surely such a one. He represented God, and he was loved and trusted by God.

In this matter Zerubbabel is a type of Christ, for God's signet has been given to Christ. He represents God, and He is

the One whom God loves and trusts. As such a person, He is qualified to take care of the building of God's house, the church.