

## THE RESPONSE OF GOD'S PEOPLE (Haggai 1:7-15)

Haggai began to prophesy **1:1** in the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month (29th August 520 BC). Haggai's second prophecy came **2:1** in the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, (17<sup>th</sup> October 520 BC), and the final two prophecies came **2:10 & 20** In the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius (18th December 520 BC). ... This means he prophesied less than four months from the end of August to the middle of December .... By the way, this was a different Darius to the Darius the Mede in the Book of Daniel.

The year is 520 BC. The people had returned from Babylon eighteen years earlier, in 538 BC. Two years afterwards, in 536 BC, they began building the temple, - which became known as Zerubbabel's temple (the descendant of David, and the governor of Jerusalem appointed by King Cyrus). However, the work had no sooner started until it was stopped, **Ezra 4:1** Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel; **2** Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither. **3** But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us. **4** Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, **5** And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. **6** And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they unto him an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem ... **24** Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

... And from 536 BC to August 520 BC, no further rebuilding had been done. Instead, the people built their own elaborate houses (Hag. 1:4), after the model of King Solomon's palace, **II Chron. 3:3** Now these are the things wherein Solomon was instructed for the building of the house of God. The length by cubits after the first measure was threescore cubits (c. 90 ft), and the breadth twenty cubits (c. 30 ft). **4** And the porch that was in the front of the

house, the length of it was according to the breadth of the house, twenty cubits (c. 30 ft), and the height was an hundred and twenty (c. 180 ft); and he overlaid it within with pure gold. <sup>5</sup> And the greater house he cieled [*overlaid*] with fir tree, which he overlaid with fine gold, and set thereon palm trees and chains.

In other words, while the house of God was in ruins, the people were building beautiful homes for themselves! ... And the Lord, through Haggai, told them, <sup>4</sup> Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? ... <sup>5</sup> ... Consider your ways [*give careful thought ... consider how you have fared*]. <sup>6</sup> Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. ... But such is the grace and patience of God towards them, He repeated, <sup>7</sup> Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. ... Instead of giving up on them, He made every effort, - He went the 'extra mile', - because they were His beloved and chosen offspring of Abraham, His covenant people. Despite all they had done in the past, He loved them, and that is why He had chastised them during those seventy years in Babylon ... When God sets His love upon you, He never takes it away. His love is not 'switched on and off' ... He loves us in spite of everything we do for we are precious to Him because He sent His Son to die on the cross to redeem our lost souls, He is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (II Peter 3:9).

And that is what was happening in Jerusalem for God was 'longsuffering' with these people whom He loved. He did not give up on them, even though they had allowed other priorities to override what they ought to have been doing for God. ... 'Seek first the Kingdom of God' is the priority of the believer. Put anything else in His place, and only disappointment and failure will follow. Benjamin Franklin wrote, "I never knew a man who was good at making excuses who was good at anything else". Have you heard the 'hymn' *Excuses* ... It sounds a little bit 'trite', but still, it makes a fair point ...

Excuses, excuses, you'll hear them every day. And the Devil he'll supply them, if the church you stay away. When people come to know the Lord,

the Devil always loses, So to keep them folks away from church, he offers them excuses.

In the summer it's too hot. And, in the winter, it's too cold. In the spring time when the weather's just right, you find some place else to go. Well, it's up to the mountains or down to the beach or to visit some old friend. Or, to just stay home and kinda relax and hope that some of the kin folks will start dropping in.

Well, the church benches are too hard. And, that choir sings way too loud. Boy, you know how nervous you get when you're sitting in a great big crowd. The doctor told you, "Now, you better watch them crowds. They'll set you back." But, you go to that old ball game because you say "it helps you to relax."

Well, a headache Sunday morning and a backache Sunday night. But by worktime Monday morning, you're feeling quite alright. While one of the children has a cold, "Pneumonia, do you suppose?" Why the whole family had to stay home, just to blow that poor kid's nose.

Well, the preacher he's too young. And, maybe he's too old. The sermons they're not hard enough. And, maybe they're too bold. His voice is much too quiet-like. Sometimes he gets too loud. He needs to have more dignity. Or, else he's way too proud.

Well, the sermons they're too long. And, maybe they're too short. He ought to preach the word with dignity instead of "stomp and snort." Well, that preacher we've got must be "the world's most stuck up man." Well, one of the lady's told me the other day, "Well, he didn't even shake my hand."

Excuses, excuses, you'll hear them every day. And the Devil he'll supply them if the church you stay away. When people come to know the Lord, the Devil always loses, So to keep them folks away from church, he offers them excuses.

... And that is what was happening in Jerusalem for sixteen years. The temple was not being built, and yet the people managed to build their own homes to the highest standards. They knew exactly where to find the best blocks, and the highest quality of wood, and the most beautiful flooring ... and everything in their homes was of the very best while they were allowing the house of God, - in Haggai's words, - to 'lie waste'. There is something sadly amiss when such a situation develops!

God is good though, and He is faithful, - more than we deserve, - for He looks beyond how we are to what He sees we shall become. He knew

these people and He loved them, and He had a purpose for them. He instructed them, <sup>8</sup>Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Leave your beautiful homes, - they will be there when you come back ... leave them, go off into the woods and forests. Take your hatchet and your saw and cut down the best trees and bring them back and begin again building My house.

He set the evidence before them as to how it had not benefitted them putting their own interests ahead of God's priority, <sup>9</sup>Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. <sup>10</sup>Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. <sup>11</sup>And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands. ... God *is* jealous, and for everything He has done for us, He expects to be the focus of our attention, **Phil. 1:21** For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ... C.T. Studd, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last". The Lord Jesus, **Mt. 7:24** whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: <sup>25</sup>And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

... And being led 'from the top', that is what they did in obedience to the Lord's instructions, <sup>12</sup>Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest *[both the civil and the religious leaders]*, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of *the LORD their God*, and the words of Haggai the prophet, *as the LORD their God* had sent him, and the people did fear before *[showed reverence for]* the LORD. ... The people attended to the message of God through the servant of God, Haggai! And through the physical act of rebuilding the temple, they indicated the shift in their spiritual lives from devotion to self towards devotion to God.

Imagine what their neighbours were saying when they saw the people building the temple, - the earthly building wherein the presence of God dwelt for over 360 years until the Babylonians destroyed it! ... Now,

under the direction of Zerubbabel, the people were building it once again, **13** Then spake Haggai the LORD'S messenger in the LORD'S message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD ... God was with them in their work!

Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed the first temple on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of Av (late July 586 BC). It continues to be the saddest day in the Jewish calendar, and it is celebrated every year (It is also the same date, - to the very day, - the Romans destroyed the second temple in 70 AD) ... From 586 to 538, it lay in ruins ... They began digging the foundations in 536 but stopped ... and the temple site lay idle, - in a wasteland, - until they began building at the end of the summer of 520, **14** And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, **15** In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king ... and it was completed almost four years later, as Ezra records, **Ezra 6:15** this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar *[March]*, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king ... in 516 BC, seventy years after it was destroyed,

God keeps His Word for that is what He promised He would do through Jeremiah, even before the Jews were carried off to Babylon. God had told Jeremiah, **Jer. 25:10** I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. **11** And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. ... **10** For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. **11** For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. **12** Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. **13** And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. **14** And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.

God does everything for a reason, - He always has a purpose behind it and ultimately, - even when we cannot see it, - *always* all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. ... *Always*. And God's Word is *full* of promises and every one of those promises He will fulfil to His glory and for the good of His people.

At the beginning of our study, we noted Haggai began to prophesy **1:1** in the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month (29th August 520 BC). At the end of chapter one we are told, they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month *121<sup>st</sup> September!*, in the second year of Darius the king (v.14,15). ... In those intervening three weeks, the Jews finished up their necessary business, such as harvesting the figs and grapes, and removing the debris from the temple site, and organising everything so they were ready to begin. ... God's hand was clearly in it all as He motivated and used His people to carry out His work, to His glory.

It is a simple principle we often underestimate, and yet it is so crucial ... God must have His primary place, - that is what the people in Haggai's day learned, to their benefit and blessing. Warren Wiersbe described it, "If the Lord is to be pleased with us and glorified before an unbelieving world, we must hear His Word, believe it, and act upon it, no matter what the circumstances may be".