

## THE RELIANCE OF GOD'S PEOPLE (Haggai 2:1-)

In the opening chapter of this brief prophetic book of Haggai we traced how God's word to His people was received and faithfully applied. Up until this point, - from their return from exile until Haggai's opening prophecy, - their personal ambitions had preceded their desire for the rebuilding of the temple. This changed though, for three weeks after Haggai spoke to them the work began in earnest, 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 (1:14,15).

However, it is one thing commencing the work, but it is something else being wholly *committed* to it! It is easy to begin well when we are 'riding high' and the enthusiasm is motivating us ... but it is quite something else when we start to become used to the daily grind of what is needing to be done. That is when it is easy to be tempted to give less than our best or to move on to something else. Sadly, that is what was happening with some of the workers in Jerusalem.

The rebuilding of the temple was not a 'take it or leave it' project. God did not approach the people with the attitude ... do it if it suits you, or if it doesn't suit, it doesn't really matter. That is *not* what God told them for the work *did* matter because if these folk would not commit themselves to the rebuilding of the temple, the temple would continue to lie in ruins for many years to come. And so Haggai set out not to *discourage* these people, but instead to 'lift their spirits' by *encouraging* them to achieve their goal, <sup>2:1</sup> In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the LORD by the prophet Haggai, saying, <sup>2</sup> Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying, <sup>3</sup> Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? <sup>4</sup> Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the

LORD, and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts: <sup>5</sup> According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.

... And this was the *perfect* time because the twenty-first day of the seventh month was the final day of the Feast of the Tabernacles which began on the fifteenth day of the same month ... when the children of Israel remembered, celebrated, and gave thanks to God for the harvest and for keeping them through their forefathers' wilderness wanderings (cf. Lev. 23:34-43). ... By no accident, this was also the same day, - over 430 years earlier, - when King Solomon had dedicated the first temple on the same spot! ... Coincidence? Absolutely not for God has every date meticulously recorded in His calendar! ... God does not work in coincidences! He was reminding these people how He is in control!

Firstly, He told them to **Remember**, <sup>2</sup> Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying, <sup>3</sup> Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory?

He began to address the 'oldies' first ... and what a part they had already played in His plan for they had been faithful through the years of captivity, and since their return to Jerusalem. Haggai was one of the 'oldies' who could look back and **remember** the 'glory days' when the former temple was the pride of the Jewish nation. King Solomon, who built it, was long-since dead, but his temple had remained beautiful and magnificent. Each sabbath and the holy days, the people 'flocked' into it ... Many of us can remember, - ... something like Haggai, - back through the years when our churches were filled to capacity, and the hymns were sung with great enthusiasm, and the Word of God was preached fearlessly ... Looking back ... and that was how God began speaking to these people, who could **remember** those days long ago. ... But it changed drastically when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon ransacked Jerusalem,

and the beloved temple was razed to the ground. Since that time, that sacred area was a wasteland with the rubble a constant reminder of how their glory had been plundered. ... Yes, there remained many, - like Haggai, - who could **remember** what it was like when ‘this house’ was ‘in her first glory’.

Isn't it often the case when everything is going well around us, we take what we have for granted? ... And then, when those days slip into the past, we wish they were back. Will we ever see a return to churches being full again in this land, and to how it used to be? ... Or are those days gone forever? ... All you elderly men and women who were in Jerusalem and who witnessed the presence of God in the first temple, <sup>3</sup> Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory?

**Remember**, but also **Realise**, how do ye see it now? ... In the present, - at this very moment ... honestly, before God, how do ye see it now? You were taken into captivity and your beloved city was destroyed ... and you could not do a thing about it! ... And in Babylon, you realised how much you had lost, and you mournfully wailed, **Ps. 137:4** How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land? <sup>5</sup> If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, ... <sup>6</sup> If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. ... But the Lord kept you to bring you back to be involved in His rebuilding plan. He is again giving you the opportunity to accomplish His purpose, with His help and guidance.

... **Remember**, **Realise**, and **Recognise**, is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? ... To look at, the new building will not be as grand as Solomon's temple. It will not have the splendour of the first temple, and neither will it contain the ark of the covenant ... It will be built on a smaller scale, and with fewer resources. All you folk who can remember the first temple, do not be disappointed with or ‘look down on’ this new temple because, - as it was with the first temple, so it will be with the

second temple ... it will be God's dwelling-place among us, built in our times for His glory! ... Time moves on. We cannot live in the past, so we must go forward. There is no point in harking back to how it used to be for those days are gone ... and we have to trust God to lead us in the days ahead!

There is a dichotomy here though. While it does not always do you good to keep looking back, at the same time, sometimes it is needful. Today's mantra is "don't look back ... the past is over and done with ... forget the past."

However, the Bible tells us it is sometimes good to look back, especially to look back to recognise those times when God's people knew His blessings in abundance, **Jer. 6:16** Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. ... And in Haggai's prophecy also, he referred them to the same principle for he instructed them, Consider your ways. 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 (1:7,8). ... He was not telling them to go back to the old days, because they couldn't, - you cannot go back to the past ... but he *was* telling them to get back to where they had been with God ... That is the message he was giving them, for being away from God had achieved nothing in their history but heartache and failure. Habakkuk put it like this, O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy (Hab. 3:2).

Indeed, time and again God had appealed to His people through the prophets, **Joel 2:12** Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; **13** And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. ... **Hosea 14:1** O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou

hast fallen by thine iniquity ... <sup>4</sup> I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely. ... **Zech. 1:3** Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts.

**Remember, Realise, Recognise ... and Be Strong.** <sup>4</sup> Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD ... The message from the ‘top down’ was clear and simple, and it was the same message God’s people had proved on so many occasions, **Ps. 118:6** The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me? ... **Ps. 27:1** the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? ... **Is. 40:31** they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint ... **Ps. 46:1** God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. <sup>2</sup> Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. ... **Is. 41:10** Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

God was speaking to Zerubbabel the governor, to Joshua the high priest, - the civil and religious powers, - and to the people ... and the message was the same for them all. ... But Lord, how can we be strong when we are in of a seemingly impossible situation? ... How can we work when the enemy is planning our demise? ... And the Lord answered personally, be strong, O Zerubbabel ... be strong, O Joshua ... and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work *I serve, achieve what you are there to do!* for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts. ... Despite the opposition, God is on *your* side, and His grace is altogether sufficient for you because His strength is made perfect in your weakness (II Cor. 12:9) ... When God is with you, none can stop His work, **Is. 45:2** I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: <sup>3</sup> And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.

And you see what comes next, **Remember, Realise, Recognise, Be Strong ... Be Secure.** The enemy tried to destroy you in Egypt, and you could have perished in the wilderness, and the people of Jericho could have torn you in shreds, and the Philistines could have crushed you ... There were a multitude of times you could have been gone, but for Me, says God. God kept you ... why? because you are His, and He vowed, he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye (*Zech. 2:8*). ... “No power of Hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from His hand till He returns or calls me home, Here in the power of Christ I’ll stand”.

The old message has not changed for God continues to guard His people ... and that is how we are still here! Satan is powerful, but he is under God’s authority. He cannot *move*, without God allowing him! The devil is not bound, but He *is* hindered in what God permits him to do. For the children of Israel in Haggai’s day, many of them feared the future for they thought any hope of progress was futile, *but it was not the case* because, - as God had previously spoken through Jeremiah, - the plan of God for His people was ‘thoughts of peace, and not of evil’ (*Jer. 29:11*) so that His glory would be displayed.

The times of Haggai are not far removed from the days in which we live. If we take our eyes off God, we shall surely waver and falter. After all, do you honestly see it all getting better any time soon? I don’t think so ... very much the opposite. It looks as if we are losing the battle. It looks as if the enemy is ‘at the walls’, surrounding the Church of Christ, screaming obscenities at God’s people, threatening them because they will not conform to the spirit of the age ... Sadly, some professing believers have chosen to comply with the world’s agenda, - they have been ‘won over’ by the deceitful enemy. ... But if you are trying to be faithful, it all seems to be so ‘upside down and inside out’ and yet, God speaks through Haggai to us today, **Haggai 2:5** According to the word that I

covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. ... God swore through the psalmist, **Ps. 89:34** My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. ... As with the children of Israel, we are in a covenant, - a covenant sealed with the blood of the Lamb, the precious blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son ... It is a covenant God decreed in eternity, - His unconditional covenant of sovereign saving and keeping grace.

To the believer suffering the most horrific persecution today, God promises, my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. And to congregations like ourselves, who might have our fears for the future, the promise is the same, my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. ... Haggai and his people were restarting the work they had abandoned sixteen years earlier ... but they are returning to it *now* and they intend to keep at it until the work is completed to the glory of God!

You can be sure of it, God honours His faithful servants, as we shall see in the remainder of this short book. Often, we wonder how He can do it, but He can, and He has proved Himself always faithful to His people. When, in turn, we in this place are faithful to Him, all the promises we read about in those Old Testament times, they will be as good today as ever they were. Amen!