

THE RESILIENCE OF GOD'S PEOPLE (Haggai 2:6-9)

Is God speaking today, or is He silent, or is there so much noise we cannot hear Him? ... Haggai was one of the three prophets at the end of the Old Testament, - the other two are Zechariah and Malachi. ... There is a period between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament known as the 'four hundred silent years'. They began at the conclusion of Malachi's prophecy, **Mal. 4:5** Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: **6** And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse ... and they finished with the arrival of John the Baptist (Mt. 3:1).

During those four hundred years, however, there was great activity throughout the land of Israel. It began with the Medo-Persian empire as the major power until it was replaced by Alexander the Great and the Greek Empire in 332 BC. They brought their pagan traditions and intermarried with the local Jewish girls, under a policy of 'hellenization', especially in the northern regions such as Galilee. Then in 312 BC the Egyptians invaded, and in 204 BC Syria conquered Jerusalem. In 171 BC Antiochus Epiphanes, a Hellenistic king of the Seleucid Empire, took over the land. He was an extremely vile character who delighted in blaspheming God and antagonising God's people. One of his most repulsive exploits was when he rode into the temple in Jerusalem on a horse, - an 'unclean' animal the Jews would not allow into sacred places, - and he threw the head of a pig, - another 'unclean' animal, - into the Holy of Holies, the most sacred part of the temple. Nothing could have been more offensive to the people! ... He was bad, evil, wicked! At this time, the Jews, led by Judas Maccabees and his four brothers, revolted and recaptured Jerusalem in 165 BC. This introduced the 'Hasmonean dynasty' which was the only period in Jewish history since returning from Babylon the Jews ruled themselves. The Hasmonean dynasty was ended when the Romans conquered the land in 63 BC.

So, these four hundred years in the land of Israel from Malachi to John the Baptist were anything but silent! Spiritually though, they *were*, for there was an absence of prophetic declaration. God was silent. There were no prophets. God sent no messages to the people during the four hundred intertestamental years.

Since the Jews had returned from Babylon and resettled in Jerusalem, there was a period of eighteen long years between 538 to 520 BC when there was no prophet and no prophecies. Since Jeremiah, - *before* the captivity, - and since Daniel, - *during* the captivity, - there had been a prophetic silence ... and then came this elderly prophet, Haggai, in 520 BC with a message for the people to build the second temple. God, - “the Lord of Hosts” (1:2,5,7,9,14; 2:4,6,7,8,9 [*twice*], 11,23 [*twice*]), - was speaking through Haggai and the people were instructed to *consider*, - to examine, to prioritise, - afresh their commitment to Him (1:5,7; 2:15,18), **1:13** Then spake Haggai the LORD'S messenger in the LORD'S message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD (1:13; 2:4).

Here, at the outset, God is assuring them of **HIS PRESENCE**, **2:4** 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. ... But Lord, where are You? Where have You been since we returned from Babylon? Where were you when we started rebuilding the temple, but were forced to stop because of the enemy? ... Where were You, Lord? Why did You not help us?

And the Lord replies, I never left you for I have always been with you. You would not be in the land but for Me, and you would not still be here if it was not for Me. If your enemies would have had their way, they would have destroyed you the moment you came back into the city, but

I held them back and protected you, **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. ... You are here because I have brought you here and I have kept you here!

Again, when we consider our relationship with the Lord, how many times we could have wandered off, but He did not allow it to happen for He came after us and kept us ... and even when we dabbled in disobedience. He never abandoned us because He has covenanted with us, **Is. 41:13** I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. ... And that is what He was doing with these people in Jerusalem. He was assuring them of **His presence**.

He then comforted them with **HIS PROMISE**, **Haggai 2:6** Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; **7** And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. **8** The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. **9** The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts. ... What a promise! ... And what God promises, He fulfils, and He never promises anything He has no intention of bringing to pass. Neither does He promise anything contrary to His will. He never changes His mind, nor compromises on His promises. He does not shroud them in mystery, so we cannot understand what He means for He says what He means, and He means what He says.

Who, though, is He referring to as the desire of all nations? The only answer we shall consider just now is the answer God's Word gives us in the New Testament, - Scripture is always the best commentary on Scripture. In the epistle to the Hebrews the writer quotes from the Greek version (Septuagint) of this verse, **Heb. 12:26** Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth

only, but also heaven. ... He was writing to a Jewish readership and referring them back to the scene on Mount Sinai, prior to the giving of the Law to Moses. While the twelve tribes camped at the bottom, Moses climbed the mountain where the Lord spoke to him, **Ex. 19:3** And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; **4** Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. **5** Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: **6** And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. ... Basically, if the people obeyed, all would be well, but if they did not obey, there would be fearful consequences and they (this generation) would perish in the wilderness.

When Moses told them all God had said, the people agreed, **8** And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD. ... Three days afterwards, - during which the people had time to prepare, - a spectacular phenomenon occurred, **Ex. 19:16** ... there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. ... God had descended upon that mountain in fire, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and an earthquake and ... understandably, the people were petrified! God was unapproachable for if anyone touched the mountain they would die immediately.

The writer to the Hebrews explains that is the scene Haggai 2:6 refers to. It was a terrible and frightening reminder of what God can do. However, Haggai's prophecy had a further application for his referring to the scene on Mount Sinai not only relates to the past, but it also describes something which is yet to take place on a much grander scale ... which Jesus also prophesied, **Mt. 24:27** For as the lightning cometh out of the east,

and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. **28** For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together. **29** Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. Isaiah prophesied about it too, **Is. 13:13** Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. . . . And John, **Rev. 6:12** And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; **13** And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. **14** And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

There is coming a day, God said through Haggai to the people, when He will not only shake a small remote piece of the earth as He did at Sinai, but He will shake the whole planet, including the heavens . . . And when He has finished shaking, that is when *‘the desire of the nations’* will come. That is the Lord Jesus for, as He taught His disciples on the Mount of Olives, **Mt. 24:29** Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. **30** And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. **31** And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. . . . That is **His promise**.

And so, God has told His people about **His presence** and **His promise**, and now He tells them how He will bring **HIS PEACE**, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts (Haggai 2:7). . . . The meaning of the phrase ‘the desire of all nations’ can be applied in a variety of different ways, but ultimately, its most glorious application is to the Lord Jesus when He comes to establish His

Kingdom on earth, as Zechariah and Isaiah also describe, **Zech. 14:16** it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts. ... **Is. 9:6** the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. **7** Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

In Haggai's day, when the people looked around them, they saw the rubble and the debris from Solomon's old temple, and the ruined walls of the city. They knew how genuinely hard it was to 'pick themselves up' again after Babylon, and how difficult it was contending with those intent on stopping them after those first two years back in Jerusalem. ... They gave up trying to rebuild the temple, and they started 'doing their own things'. ... They went out into the fields and sowed their seeds but no matter how much they sowed, they harvested little (1:6). They drank, but were never filled, clothed but never warm, earning wages only to put it into their pockets with holes. They looked for much (1:9), but it came to so disappointingly little. Nothing was working for them (v.10,11) until they returned to the Lord and His work (1:12-15). ... That is where it all changed for then He gave them "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness", **2:8** The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts, - He promised them a portion of His wealth ... and the promises kept on coming, **9** The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.

Solomon's temple was *the best*, for kings and queens came from near and far to see it. But, even it in all its splendour was nothing compared to how God dwells and will dwell among His people in perfect peace. The earth was never meant to last, but the Heavenly is eternal ... and that

is where Haggai was focussing his people's attention ... on what God promised them for the future.

Today, the Word of God helps us see past the chaos and the confusion around us. Of course, the godlessness saddens us, nevertheless, we are trusting in God's promise, Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts (Haggai 2:6,7).

His **presence**, His **promise**, His **peace** ... God's people continued, with Him by their side. Four years later they succeeded in building the new temple, despite all the adversities for God expected them to keep pressing on, to stand firm, and not give up until the work was completed.

That is the lesson for us too, - to keep pressing on, to stand firm, to not give up, - ... for the second coming of the Lord Jesus is confidently within our view!

When He cometh, when He cometh to make up His jewels,
All His jewels, precious jewels, His loved and His own ...
He will gather, He will gather the gems for His Kingdom ...
They shall shine in their beauty, bright gems for His crown.