

Notes for Sunday 15th August 2021

Haggai 2:1-9 The glory of God

A precise date!

The prophecy of Haggai 2 is given a very precise date (2:1). In our calendar it's the 17th of October, 520BC. Why is that important?

The prophecies in Haggai 1 started with a call to rebuild the temple (1:1) followed just over 3 weeks later (1:14-15) by the people actually starting work on rebuilding.

So, this prophecy happens about a month after work had started. In that time the people had had time to discover how hard the work was going to be (they weren't builders and they had no modern tools), how long it was going to take and how few resources they had to fill it with the gold and silver items needed for its operation. Some old people might even have remembered what the old temple looked like from 67 years before and were grumbling about how much smaller and less impressive this new one was (2:3).

This was also the busiest month for temple festivals (the Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement and Feast of Tabernacles would have taken place). They would have been conducted amid the rubble and compared badly with how it had been when Solomon dedicated the first temple at the same festival centuries before (1 Kings 8) – when God's glory filled the temple.

So, what they needed was encouragement to stick with the task. Here there is none of the guilt of the first prophecy (1:4) but, instead, promises from God to be with them so they could be strong and unafraid (2:4-5).

Is God still with us?

When Solomon dedicated the original temple (2 Kings 8) the glory of God came down on the temple and filled it. The temple became the symbol of God's promise to live among his people.

After centuries of rebellion, Israel was punished by being conquered by the Babylonians (in 587BC). They broke down the walls of Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, took away all its treasures and sent the people into exile (2 Chronicles 36:18-20). The prophet Ezekiel had a vision of God's glory leaving the temple (Ezekiel 10).

These people were those returning from exile nearly 70 years later. So, they could rightly ask, because all this was caused by Israel's sin – what possibility is there of God ever being with us again?

Haggai 2 has echoes of the Exodus story (Ex 32-34) where the people rebelled against God by building themselves a golden calf idol – even while they were meeting God at Mount Sinai! There he had threatened to leave them but, after they had repented, made them the promise to be with them (this is what is being echoed in 2:4-5).

Be strong and do not fear

These were a small, weak people, surrounded by enemies and ruled over by the Persian empire. They would have felt weak and fearful. But God's command is to be strong and work (2:4), because he is with them and do not fear, because his Spirit is still among them (2:5). They need to press on with the work, despite its difficulties.

The desired of all nations

There are further promises in 2:6-9. The glory of the temple can be seen 2 ways – the glory of God's presence, as in 2 Kings 8, and the glory of the gold and silver that filled the original temple.

God promises that, even though the buildings may be less impressive than what went before, his glory will fill the new temple just as it did the old. He will still be among his people.

The gold and silver looted from the temple by the Babylonians might have been gone forever but, miraculously, Darius, the ruler of the Persian empire that had conquered those Babylonians, took a very positive view of his subject peoples and made all the resources of the Persian empire available for rebuilding and furnishing the temple (Ezra 6)

That is probably the immediate reference of the 'desired of all nations' from 2:7. But we can see an even greater fulfilment – because Jesus is the ultimate 'desired of all nations' – we see this as a messianic prophecy.

So, what became of this temple? It stayed in place for 500 years, and was finally upgraded/rebuilt by King Herod in Jesus' time – it became so glorious it was considered a wonder of the world.

But, even though Jesus and the early church worshipped in the temple (remember our studies in Mark and Acts), things had moved on. Because, after Pentecost (Acts 2) God's presence among his people by his Spirit is no longer related to a building, but rather to his Church (Ephesians 2:19-22, 2 Corinthians 6:16). And this is no longer for just 1 nation, its for the whole world, anyone who follows Jesus.