

Two Year Bible Trek
Week 75
Haggai: Zechariah 1-8

Key Concepts: The key concept is that God will act if the people are faithful.

Stories: Haggai begins with a complaint from God that God's temple has not been built followed by a speech encouraging the people to rebuild the Temple, the lack of grandeur of the new Temple, God's promise to restore the fortunes of Israel, the promise of a greater Temple, a reminder that the people are ritually unclean, the promise that God will bless the people when the foundation of the Temple is laid and concludes with a promise that Zerubbabel will be God's new king over Judah. The first half of Zechariah includes a call to repentance, eight visions, the crowning of a messianic figure, a question about fasting and finally a promise that God will return to Zion and bless Judah.

Brief Summary: Haggai is a prophet whose work we can clearly locate in the history of the people of Israel. Haggai is a contemporary of Zechariah, Ezra and Zerubbabel who all worked together during the period of the Jews return to Israel. Many scholars give credit to Haggai as being the leader of the movement to rebuild the Temple. The opening of Haggai tells us that the people were not yet ready to rebuild the Temple. While we are not sure of the exact reasons, all efforts at restoration had failed. Regardless, when Haggai arrives he declares that God has brought about a drought because the people have not rebuilt the Temple and returned to appropriate worship. He then encourages them to begin the process again....and they do.

As the Temple was being rebuilt there was great discouragement because the new Temple was only a shadow of its former self...and was taking a long time to build. Haggai promises the people that if they continue, God will return and "shake the nations" in order that all of the wealth of the world would flow to Israel. The prophet wants to be sure however that the people understand that they are still sinful and it is God's grace alone that will bring them blessing, not simply the rebuilding of the Temple. Haggai also tells the people that Zerubbabel will be made King over Israel, though this never happens.

Zechariah, as mentioned above was a contemporary of Haggai. His book is a transition piece from ancient Israelite prophecy, to apocalyptic literature (a particular genre of literature in which heaven and earth are merged in a cosmic struggle). Apocalyptic was a product of the exile and came to full flower following the return of the exiles. Zechariah's eight visions are examples of this genre. Each is composed of symbolic images. These include mystical riders, Satan, lampstands, flying scrolls, and chariots with different colored horses. Angels are often the intermediaries who explain the visions. What is interesting about these visions (many of which we will encounter again in Revelation) is that they are linked to specific events and people. The high priest Joshua and Zerubbabel are specifically mentioned in some of the visions. Later apocalyptic will not do this.

In the midst of these visions Zechariah is also given some very practical instructions for the people as well. In Chapter 7 a delegation of returnees wants to know if they should continue to fast for the destruction of the Temple, since it is now rebuilt. Zechariah instructs them, on God's command, that fasting for the Temple or not is not an important issue. What matters far more is that they are obedient to the Torah and care for those who cannot care for themselves. This portion of the book concludes with God's promise that God is returning to Jerusalem and will bless Judah...very much like the ending of Haggai.

1. What do you make of the connection between building the Temple and God's blessing?
2. How is Haggai's leadership role reflected in your understanding of the role of pastors today?
3. What is your response to the apocalyptic images of Zechariah?