

PostExilicProphets 21-03-25a

Good evening, welcome to the Thursday night Bible class at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 25th of March 2021. We're going to start a new study tonight.

It is the post-exilic prophets. This takes up the last three books of the Old Testament, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. It is Haggai, not Haggai or Haggai or whatever else you might have heard.

It is Haggai, then Zechariah, and then Malachi. These three individuals were detailed by God to provide the closing revelations for the age of the Old Testament until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is going to be about 500 years hence. So what these individuals deliver is going to be the final word from God for half a millennium.

And it seems apropos for us to take up this study since we feel like we are near the close of our own dispensation, the themes and the guidance that God gives to his own people at the close of an age seems apt and pertinent for our own time and our own circumstance. And it will become even more clear that that is the case as we dive into our study. So you can start a fresh page in your notebook or open up a fresh notebook or a fresh file, and we're going to begin with the prophecy of Haggai tonight.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, and we'll begin. Father, we are grateful for the opportunity to spend time together in fellowship and in the study of your word. We thank you for this portion of your word and ask that you will bless it to the sustenance and encouragement of each heart that we will find in these Old Testament pages, wonderful motivation and encouragement to stay our course, be faithful and obedient until that day when the Lord Jesus comes to take us to himself and present us before your throne.

We pray these things in amen. Well, anytime we start a new book, it's good to get at least a brief introduction, and this will be brief. This is, first of all, named for its author.

His name is Haggai, and the typical dictionaries that you look up or whatever, they will say, well, his name means festive or celebratory or something like that, but it's not typical. It's not quite the usual construction for an adjective in Hebrew, and I won't go into all the details, but I agree with those who think that this is actually more of a noun form with an abbreviated part of the Lord's name. You remember, for example, in the modern day, Benjamin Netanyahu, Benjamin, of course, son of the right hand, and then Natan, which is from the verb to give, and Yahu is the Lord.

Yehoah, if you will, which got corrupted by the Germans into Jehovah by misreading the consonants and vowels. As you know, the Masoretes never would say the sacred name of God when they, and of course, this is much later days than Moses and the prophets, but in the days of the Lord Jesus and after, they did not want to pronounce the holy name of God, that even

today in English, you will see observant Jews, if they're talking about God, it will be G and then a hyphen and then D so that they're not even printing the name God in their correspondence. But in those days, they would come to the Tetragrammaton, which is in Hebrew, Y-H-W-H, and they wouldn't say Yehoah or Yahweh, they would say Adonai, they would substitute the Lord so that they weren't saying his name.

And to remind the reading scribe that that was what he should say, they put the vowel points of Adonai on the consonants for Yahweh or Yehoah. And so you ended up with, when the Germans came and they didn't fully understand what was in front of them in the vowel pointed text, they tried to apply the vowels of Adonai to the consonants of Yahweh and they came up with Yehoah or Jehovah, because they can't say a Y and they can't say a W. So we ended up with Jehovah and the Jehovah's Witnesses, and it's as bad a mispronunciation as Jesus is for our incarnate Savior. I would much prefer if it wasn't such a strange thing to do in this day to call him by his actual name, which is Yeshua.

Yeshua. Jesus is, it would be like calling me Shmiemel or something in some other language, it doesn't really resemble his actual name. And it gets more and more distance from the meaning of his name, which comes from two words, which is the Lord, Yah or Yahweh, and then the word for save, which is Yashah, and so you get Yeshua, the Lord saves.

And that's the meaning of his name. Well, Haggai is actually from a verb, Hagag, which means to celebrate. This is H-A-G-A-G.

And then with the divine name, Yahu on the end. So Hagag Yahu eventually got shortened to Hagia or Haggai. It's also possible that in that process, the actual I ending is the possessive, the singular personal possessive.

And so it could mean my feast, but I'm sure as many other scholars are that this started out meaning celebrate the Lord. So Haggai, your humble pastor's opinion is that the original meaning of this name is celebrate the Lord. There's a noun from Hagag that's Hug, not huge, but Hug, H-U-G.

And that noun means circle. And you can see how that would comport with the meaning of the verb, because you would gather the family circle. You would gather in a circle, you would gather together and focus on something that isn't center of the circle.

You circle a thing. And if there's a fire in the middle, you're looking at the fire. If there's a guest in the middle or a play in the middle or instrumentalist or whatever it may be, the circle gathers around and focuses attention on what is in the middle.

So the circle noun, H-U-G comes from this verb, Haggai, which means, or Hagag, which means to celebrate, to focus attention on a thing, put it at the center of focus, the center of the circle. So to do that with the Lord really represents the theme of this book. As you may remember from our Kings and Prophets study, Haggai's two-chapter message focuses on the need to

finish what the people who have returned from captivity started.

They had laid the foundations of the temple decades before. More and more of them had returned from captivity and entered the land and come to Jerusalem. And they had built their own houses, but they had not built the house of the Lord.

And Haggai, along with Zechariah, calls the people to finish that work. And so that's the theme of the book is finish what you started. And what you started was the work of ensuring that the worship of the Lord is at the center of your personal life, at the center of your community life, at the center of the purpose for your capital city, and therefore the focus and purpose of the existence of your newly restored presence in the land.

Make sense? Haggai, celebrate the Lord, praise the Lord, focus on the Lord. That's his message. That's his name.

The ministry of Haggai only lasts four months. His book is only two chapters long. It is the second shortest book in the Old Testament.

The only shorter book is Obadiah. There is widespread agreement in terms of speculation. There's a lot of Bible scholars who feel that Haggai was probably pretty old at the point that he delivers this prophecy.

And this is based on chapter two, verse three, which is something we've referred to off and on across the years, where he asks the question, who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory, in its first glory? Who saw the temple before it was knocked down? There's only a few old timers, but when he asks this question, you get the idea that the implication is he is one of the few left who had seen Solomon's temple before it was destroyed in 586. Well, this takes us to the time of these prophecies. And we have a very specific fix on the year and the month and the day for Haggai's ministry.

And it is 520 BC, 520 BC. Now your first pop quiz for the night, when did Solomon's temple get knocked down and destroyed? What year? You can answer out loud. Any one of you in the vast throng assembled before me.

When was the temple knocked down and destroyed along with Jerusalem? 586 is correct. You win a free bookmark, which the pastor will give you after class. 586.

If this is 520, how many years have passed? 86 minus 20 is what? 66 years, right? I mean, I'm an English major, but I'm pretty sure if we go from 86 down to 20, that's 66 years later. Now your second pop quiz question of the night, let's pay close attention now, do better on this one. How long was the Babylonian captivity? 70 years.

You get a double-sided bookmark. 70 years. Now, if the people are already back in the land and back in Jerusalem, and they've already laid the foundation of the temple years earlier, and God through Haggai is saying, you need to finish what you started.

How could the captivity have been 70 years from 86 to 20 when they're already back and they've already laid the foundation and they need to get busy and finish and build on that foundation. And that's 66 years. Well, they were back several years earlier to lay the foundations.

So how could the captivity have been 70 years? We're going to talk about that tonight. I know it's math and it seems tedious, but I have a great big bold face piece of my notes here labeled application. Why is it important? Why do we care? It matters a lot.

And God emphasizes the duration of this captivity for a reason, and we're going to see it as we move forward. But let me finish the introduction and we'll dive into that. So what does Haggai mean? Celebrate the Lord.

How soon we forget. Celebrate the Lord. Haggai, how are they to celebrate the Lord? You need to establish, build up, complete the place of his presence, the place of worship, the place of gathering and forming a circle around something important.

Make sense? Now, if I said, let's stop right here and see if we can think of an application, what would that application be? This is old Testament. Where is the temple today? Well, there is no temple today. There's the dome of the rock.

I know this is why we're doing a brief review as well as an introduction. There is no temple today as in terms of a physical structure in Jerusalem. Where is God's temple today? What form does the presence of God take in this dispensation? How is God present with each and every one of his people today? Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the spirit.

Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? Both individually, we are a dwelling place for God in the person of the Holy Spirit. And if we are faithful and obedient, if we have the Lord's words and keep them, then he and his father will come and dwell with us. And we have the threefold presence of God in our hearts.

And by extension in our midst, where two or three are gathered together in my name, Jesus said, there am I in the midst. And there is one place where Paul says, do you not know that your individual body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? And in another place, he uses the plural. And he says, do you not know that you all together comprise the temple of the Holy Spirit? How is it that the that which restrains is going to be taken out of the way in the man of sin is going to be revealed at the start of the tribulation period? What is it that gets taken out of the way? God's temple will be removed from the earth just as it was before the Babylonian captivity.

God's temple was removed. It was destroyed. It was utterly demolished.

And God's people went into captivity, right? A similar dark time on this earth will take place when God's current temple is removed. And that is we, that is us, that is you, you all individually and collectively. We are the place of the presence of God on this earth.

And when the presence of God leaves, almost literally all hell is going to break loose. Makes sense, doesn't it? There's a symmetry there. So we're going to talk about this 586 to 520 period here shortly.

But the last thing I want to mention is the structure of the book. We've talked about the theme and the structure is very simple. It's only two chapters and there are four messages that Haggai delivers.

You can see them. You can put a little star out in the margin of your Bible. The first one is quite obviously chapter one, verse one.

In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet. And in verse two, thus sayeth the Lord of hosts, thus speaketh the Lord of hosts saying. That is oracle or message number one.

The second one is chapter two, verse one. In the seventh month, in the 21st day of the month, came the word of the Lord by the prophet Haggai saying. So chapter two, verse one, that is the second message.

The third one is chapter two, verse 10. In the 24th day of the ninth month came the word of the Lord by Haggai. That's the third.

The fourth is chapter two, verse 20. Again, the word of the Lord came unto Haggai in the 24th day of the month saying. So four succinct messages delivered in the space of four months.

And more about the timing of these a little bit later. Now, who are these messages to? When I was making up my notes on the structure of the book, I put each message on its own line. So I have one, one, two, one, two, 10 and two, 20 each on its own line.

And I have the date of the message. And then most importantly, I'll talk about the dates. Don't worry too much about that.

But who are these messages addressed to? It's just like in the military. When you have a memorandum, it's the memorandum form, at least, you know, centuries ago when I was in is from to subject reference. Who is this memo from? Who is it to? What is the subject? And is there anything else I need to look at? Well, we're going to see all four of those things tonight.

So who is it from? The Lord God by Haggai. So from God via Haggai to whom who's on the two line on this memorandum? Well, each of the four messages has a specified target. So who is the target for message number one? It is Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah and Yeshua or Joshua, the son of Josedek, the high priest.

That's who the first one is to. All right. Who is the second one to look at verse two of chapter two, speak now to Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah and to Joshua, the son of Josedek, the high priest, and to the residue of the people.

So we've got an addition to the two line here. So Zerubbabel, Joshua and the remnant of the people. And by the way, if my language varies slightly from yours, you're looking at your new King James.

I inadvertently studied for several days out of the King James and from past experience, this is no time to switch Bibles. I noticed when I was getting my stuff ready tonight that I had a King James and I thought if I changed to my new King James, I will be utterly lost and confused. So if my wording differs from yours, just remember I'm reading from a King James should be pretty close.

So we've got the first two messages, destinies figured out, right? Take a look at verse 10 of chapter two. Who is the third message addressed to? The word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet saying, thus says the Lord of hosts, ask now the priests, ask the priests the following question. So message number three is to the priests, not the governor, not the high priest, but the functional priests, the Levite priests, the functional sons of Aaron here, right? Who's the fourth one to? Verse 20, the word of the Lord came to Haggai in the fourth and 20th day of the month saying, speak to Zerubbabel the governor saying, Zerubbabel only.

So Zerubbabel gets three out of the four. Joshua gets two out of the four. The people get one and the priests get one, covers almost everybody.

Now, what do you think about message number one in terms of its addressees? You've got Zerubbabel and you've got Joshua. What do they represent categorically speaking? Why does Zerubbabel have an office at all? What is he? He's civil government, right? Doesn't have any religious test, religious qualification, religious function. He's the governor.

What's Joshua's job? He is the high priest. So the civil government and the religious hierarchy in terms of their highest leaders are the recipients of these first two messages. So it's addressed to the civil government and to the religious government.

Now, why would that be? What's the theme of this message? Finish what you started, specifically build the house of God. What kind of cooperation is going to be required to get this done? Can the priests and the high priests do it all by themselves? Build the house of God? You can answer. Can the priests do it by themselves? No, they can't.

Can the civil government do it by themselves? Can the civil government build a religious temple? No, they can't. Can either one of them do it without the other? This requires both the civil government and the religious establishment to work together for this common goal to benefit the people. Right? Makes sense.

Now, Israel is a bit special because they are the people of God and even their government under Moses and the kings of Israel was the king was sort of God's man on the planet. Right? It wasn't a completely secular government. Notice I did not say that Zerubbabel is secular government.

He is civil government. Civil government. But we get a clue here as we're fixing to go to our break because we not only have their names, but we have their father's names.

Names are significant. Right? And this helps us out. And I think I'll save the meaning of the names for when we come back from the break.

But if this was the only Bible class you had for a day or two or three or a week to come, what would the application be? What would the takeaway for spiritual momentum and motivation and encouragement and faith and obedience? What would it be? A. God provides motivation when we lose it. If we are the people of God and we start losing motivation, God will provide it. That's why he sends Haggai.

And by the way, Zechariah is a part of the same effort. We're going to see that when we come back, but God is going to send these two prophets when the work does not proceed as it should and the people lose way, as we say in the Navy, you start out under sail and you're making good progress and then the wind dies and you lose way and you're starting to be in the doldrums and not make any progress. God will send a message of motivation, encouragement, rebuke if necessary, and light a fire under his people to get busy and do what we are here to do.

God will do this. So if we realize in our heart of hearts that we're not really hitting on all eight cylinders in our spiritual life, and if we do not take it upon ourselves to get motivated and get moving and do what we know we should do, when we should do it and how we should do it, be forewarned. God will start providing that motivation and he can do it in any number of ways.

He can withhold provision. There are innumerable instances where it's Israel in the wilderness or the days of Elijah where God shut up the heavens and provision dries up. Now God has promised provision, take no thought for what you will eat or what you will wear.

Your father in heaven knows what you need. So why would he withhold it? To get our attention. If you find customary provision and customary conditions for moving forward suddenly out of sorts and out of kilter and out of whack, I'm not sure what it means to be in whack and in kilter, but out of them we certainly know.

Stop and think, is this the Lord getting my attention that I have lost momentum in one or more areas of my life? I am not paying attention to who I am and why I'm here. We are not hapless victims of circumstance. We are not here to just navigate the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

Our lives have meaning and purpose and definition. God provides the meaning, God establishes the purpose, and God defines the parameters under which we function. And if we do not hold up our end of faith and obedience, the Lord is going to let us know.

And rather than have a continuation of long duration of withheld provision or odd and strange and inexplicable and unsolvable circumstance, one of the first things we should do is check to

see if the test or the suffering or the challenge that we are enduring right now is to remind us of who we are and why we're here, or if it has some other purpose. And there are other purposes why we are challenged, there are other reasons why we suffer, but this is one of the first ones to check. We may be able to examine ourselves and see if we are in the faith and we come up clean and clear.

Paul says, my conscience doesn't tell me I'm doing anything wrong. That doesn't mean I'm not doing anything wrong, but my conscience can't find it. And so one of my first prayers, if I examine myself, and as far as I know, I'm in the faith, I go pray the Psalm 51 prayer, Lord, try me and see if there be any wicked way in me, show me my hidden faults.

Make sense? I know enough, I should be able to identify what's wrong, but if I make an honest evaluation and I can't find the problem, then my very next step should be to go to the Lord and pray Psalm 51. Try me, you Lord, try me and see if there is any problem in me, show me those hidden faults. I want to find it, I want to fix it, I want to move forward, I want to be faithful and obedient.

That's what God is doing here in Haggai. Well, let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to take a look at why the names of the fathers are given, what the purpose of these oracles is, and how our study in the post-exilic prophets is going to proceed and its value for us at the end of our own age.

We'll see that when we come back.