Lesson 5 – Haggai & the Temple

The historical setting of Haggai and Zechariah is Ezra 5. The first group of Jews had returned around 536 BC and begun rebuilding the temple. They built the altar and laid the temple foundation but were deterred from further building by their adversaries. The opposition came especially from the Samaritans, who were offended when the Jews refused to let them join the rebuilding efforts. The Samaritans bribed local politicians to hinder the Jews' efforts. The Jews were deterred and abandoned the temple to focus on their own houses and fields. As a result, their efforts did not prosper.

Darius ruled Persia from 522 to 486 BC. He unified the empire and ruled at its peak. In his second year, c. 520 BC, the Jews resumed work on the temple. Governor Tattenai and other officials asked the Jews, "Who authorized this rebuilding of the temple?" The Jews told them about Cyrus' decree. Tattenai sent a letter to Darius requesting a search for the decree, and it was discovered in Ecbatana. Upon reading the original decree, Darius responded to Tattenai by ordering him not to interfere with the Jews' efforts. In fact, the Jews were granted the full support of the Persian government. They finished the temple in 516 BC, seventy years after its destruction. We refer to this rebuilt temple as the Second Temple.

Haggai means festival. His book is divided into four oracles, each of which is dated. The second spoke of the future glory of the temple. Though Herod renovated and expanded the temple in the first century BC, this prophecy referred to the church. It would outshine both Solomon's and the Second Temple in glory. The fourth oracle called Governor Zerubbabel God's signet ring. Kings wore a ring with an insignia they pressed into soft wax or clay to signify their authority. They could give their signet ring to someone to delegate authority. In this case, Zerubbabel represented his descendant, Jesus the Christ, to whom the Father gave all authority.

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Timeline

536-535 BC – First Jews return and rebuild the altar and temple foundation

535-534 BC – Jews encounter opposition and cease work on the temple

520 BC – Haggai and Zechariah motivate the people and work resumes

516 BC – Temple finished

Questions

1. What does the name Haggai mean?

2. In what year did Haggai preach? How many years had passed from the return from exile to Haggai's preaching? (Hag. 1:1)

3. What did the Jews say about rebuilding the temple? (Hag. 1:2)

4. To what had the Jews turned their focus? Was this important? (Hag. 1:4)

5. Was their worldly work prosperous? Why or why not? What principle is taught in both Testaments? (Hag. 1:6-11; Prov. 3:9-10; Psa. 37:25; Matt. 6:33)

6. How did the leaders and the people respond to Haggai's message? (Hag. 1:12)

7. After they'd overcome external opposition and resumed rebuilding, what discouraged the people? What did God say to encourage them? (Hag. 2:3-5)

8. What did God say about their offerings while they'd neglected to rebuild the temple? (Hag. 2:14)

9. Haggai (2:6, 21) is quoted in Heb. 12:18-29, which connects it to Exo. 19-20. At Sinai, God's voice shook the earth. In Haggai, he promised to shake it again, and to shake the heavens as well. What was introduced at Mt. Sinai? What remained after the shaking spoken of in Heb. 12:27-28? What does all of this have to do with God's temple in Haggai? (2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22)

10. What was prophesied concerning Zerubbabel? Who descended from Zerubbabel? (Hag. 2:23; Matt. 1:12-13; Luke 3:27; Matt. 28:18)

11. If the Jews never rebuilt their temple, what do you think might've happened to them? Would the remnant have preserved their genealogical and religious identity in preparation for the Messiah?