

Haggai 2

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[0:00] Haggai chapter 2, beginning at verse 1.

In the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet. Speak now to Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the son of Jehoshadak, the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people, and say, who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory?

How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the Lord. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehoshadak, the high priest.

Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the Lord. Work, for I am with you, declares the Lord of hosts. According to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt, my spirit remains in your midst.

Fear not. For, thus says the Lord of hosts, yet once more in a little while I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land, and I will shake all nations so that the treasure of all nations shall come in.

[1:25] And I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts.

And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts. On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, ask the priests about the law. If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?

The priest answered and said, no. Then Haggai said, if someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean? The priest answered and said, it does become unclean.

Then Haggai answered and said, so is it with this people. And with this nation before me, declares the Lord. And so with every work of their hands and what they offer there is unclean. Now then, consider from this day onward.

[2:32] Before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the Lord, how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty.

I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and with mildew and with hail, yet you did not turn to me, declares the Lord. Consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month.

Since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider, is the seed yet in the barn? Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have yielded nothing.

But from this day on, I will bless you. The word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month. He speaks to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms.

I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations and overthrow the chariots and their riders and the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother. On that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord of hosts.

[3 : 48] So last week, we looked at Haggai chapter 1 and saw two key phrases. First, Haggai said, consider your ways. This is chapter 1, verse 5 and 7.

We saw there that God confronts us about our misplaced priorities. Haggai was prophesying to the people who had returned to Jerusalem from the exile in Babylon.

They had been back in Jerusalem for 18 years, but the temple which the Babylonians had destroyed was still in ruins. And Haggai confronted the people. He said, you've repaired your own houses, you've rebuilt your own houses, but the house of God is an abandoned construction site.

It looks terrible. And it's an indication of how little you care about God. Because He promised that He would dwell among you if you build a house for Him.

Your priorities have been out of whack, and your life has not been going well as a result. So consider. But the second phrase we saw in chapter 1, verse 13, was a word of encouragement.

[4 : 53] I am with you. When we take His word to heart, God encourages us. Now, unlike many other Old Testament prophets who were ignored or persecuted, the people actually listened to Haggai.

They took His word to heart and they obeyed it. And so God encouraged them and gave them energy from His word and from His spirit. And they began this project of building the temple once again.

But building the temple was a massive multi-year project. I wonder, have you ever begun a new habit? Or started a big project? Or embarked on a long journey?

For the first couple of days or even couple of weeks, it's exciting. Because it's new. But after a few days or a few weeks, the initial enthusiasm dies down.

And the difficulty of the project sets in. You know, many people, perhaps you, have made a New Year's resolution to start going to the gym. But according to one study, of all the people who bought gym memberships in December, 20% of them quit by June.

[6 : 01] Another 20% quit by the following December. And the reason why fitness clubs stay in business is only half the people who still have their gym membership actually go regularly, twice a week or more.

At this point in the year, the holiday season has come and gone. And we're facing two or three more months of short days, long nights, cold and sometimes dreary weather.

And it's easy to get discouraged and defeated. And the same pattern can happen spiritually. If you're planting a new church, or starting a new ministry, starting a new small group, the first couple of months or even a year can be exciting.

But after some time, all kinds of challenges can come up. Relational tensions, disagreements about strategy and priorities, disappointing lack of response.

And you can begin to wonder, was it really worth it anyway? Maybe there was a time in your life when you had great energy for God. Maybe as a young believer.

[7:14] But now that energy and that drive that you once had has faded away. And your life as a Christian feels like the gray skies on a bone-chilling, rainy New Haven day.

Now what we'll see in this chapter, in Haggai chapter 2, is that God not only encourages us in our new beginnings, He encourages us at each step along the way as well.

What we're going to see is that God encourages us in three ways. He encourages us despite slow progress in the past. He encourages us despite, sorry, despite slow progress in the present.

Despite lingering defilements from the past. And despite dim prospects for the future. So we'll look at each of those in turn. So first, God encourages us despite slow progress in the present.

This is verses 1 through 9. The end of chapter 1 tells us it was the 24th day of the 6th month when the people began to work on the temple. And God sent them a message of encouragement.

[8:19] I'm with you. And just four weeks later, 7th month, 21st day of the month, God sent Haggai to the people with another message of encouragement.

Actually the same, He says the same thing. I'm with you. It expands on it. But the date is significant, 21st day of the 7th month, because the 21st day of the 7th month, which would be late October in our calendar, was the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

It was sort of the end of the major Israelite holiday season. The 7th month began with the Feast of Trumpets. And then there was a fasting and prayer day, the Day of Atonement.

And then there was a week-long Feast of Tabernacles from the 15th to the 21st. And large numbers of visitors would come to Jerusalem for that great feast. It was sort of like a national campout.

They'd camp out in tents for a week, remembering how when they came out of Egypt, God had sustained them in the wilderness, when they lived in tents or tabernacles, temporary dwellings.

[9:24] And they would also remember, at that same time, how hundreds of years ago, the great King Solomon, at the height of Israelite history, had dedicated his magnificent temple to the Lord in Jerusalem at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, on the exact same day.

And the glory of God had come down in a cloud to dwell in this temple. So the feast was a reminder not only of the Exodus, but also of the glory days of Jerusalem. But for the returned exiles, for the people of Haggai's time, those glory days were long gone.

The king was gone. The temple, once glorious, had been plundered and destroyed by the Babylonians. And there was only a foundation that hadn't been worked on for 15 years.

In verse 3, Haggai put into words what people were thinking and feeling. He says, who's left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now?

Is it not as nothing in your eyes? I mean, after four weeks of working on an abandoned construction site, even with modern tools, it doesn't look like much.

[10:37] And Haggai acknowledged the discouragement that the people felt when they saw the slow progress of the work. And it was beginning to sink in how long it was going to take to carry out this project.

They looked back to a glorious past that was long gone. They saw slow progress in the present. And they projected their present condition onto their vision for the future.

But Haggai acknowledged that. He gave voice to their discouragement. But he didn't stop there. In verse 4, he continued. He says, yet now, be strong, O Zerubbabel.

Be strong, O Joshua. Be strong, all you people of the land. Work, for I am with you. Haggai drew on the words that the Lord had spoken to Joshua a long time ago.

When Joshua was leading the people of Israel from the wilderness, where they had lived in tents into the promised land for the first time. And they had nothing. They had no king, no temple, no land.

[11:43] Nothing except the clothes on their backs and the tents they were living in. And the Lord said to Joshua, just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.

Be strong and courageous. Be strong and very courageous. Have I not commanded you, be strong and courageous? Three times he repeats, be strong.

Don't be frightened. Don't be dismayed. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. Haggai echoed those same words over 500 years later.

Three times he said, be strong. To Zerubbabel, to Joshua, and to the people as a whole. And he reassured them, I am with you. God is with you just like he was when you came out of Egypt.

Remember what you were just celebrating in this Feast of Tabernacles, that God was with you in the desert when you were living in tents, when you had nothing, and he led you with the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, the signs of his Holy Spirit dwelling among you.

[12:51] He says, my spirit remains in your midst. I promised that I would never leave you nor forsake you, and I haven't and I won't. So fear not.

Now in one sense, it's right to fear the Lord. When Haggai confronted the people in chapter 1 about their misplaced priorities, verse 12 says they responded by fearing the Lord.

In other words, with a reverential awe that motivated them to listen and obey because they realized who was speaking to them. That's a right kind of fear.

But in chapter 2, verse 5, Haggai warned them against a wrong kind of fear, a paralyzing, faithless, debilitating fear. He said, if you stand in awe of the Lord, you don't need to be terrified by anything else, and you will never be alone.

My spirit remains among you, fear not. When we feel discouraged and defeated, when we face long-term challenges and see little or no progress in the present, God mercifully speaks.

[14:05] He speaks into our despondency and our depression, and he speaks to us about his sufficiency and his faithfulness. Three times, Haggai reminded the people who is speaking to them, declares the Lord, declares the Lord, declares the Lord of hosts.

That means the Lord of the armies of heaven. When you're discouraged, it's good to acknowledge the source of the discouragement, to name it.

It's right to acknowledge our own feelings, whether that's sadness or anger or disappointment or whatever they may be, but Haggai says, don't stop there. Yet now hear the word of the Lord.

You see, it's very easy to focus in on our present troubles and our present lack of progress and project that, our present experience, into the future.

But Haggai says no. Instead, you must fix your eyes on what God has certainly promised to do in the future and let God's future promises shape your present experience rather than the other way around.

[15:21] Verse 6 begins with the word for. It's an important word. Fear not for, because thus does the Lord of hosts yet once more in a little while I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land.

And he promised that one day he would fill that house, he would fill his temple with glory and peace.

God says you can know that I'm with you now despite the slow progress because I'm telling you in advance what I've resolved to do in the future with this.

Haggai said to the people, I'm going to make this temple more glorious than it ever was. More glorious than when King Solomon built it with gold and silver and bronze and cedar when he was the richest and wisest man in the world and all kinds of people from all over the nations as far away as the Queen of Sheba came to give tribute to honor this great king and this great God.

Now you might ask, did that ever really happen? Did the temple that they were building actually become that glorious? Well in one sense it did.

[16:43] According to Ezra chapter 6 in Haggai's own lifetime the Persian emperor Darius paid the construction costs for the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. The treasures from the treasury of another nation that built up the house of the Lord.

And a few centuries later the temple was expanded and adorned by King Herod. Treasures from a few other nations were brought into the temple but only a few. And it was never a place of lasting peace.

But in the New Testament we see God beginning to fulfill Haggai's prophecy in an even greater way. We see God beginning to shake the heavens and the earth to bring in the treasures from all nations and fill his house with glory.

You see in the New Testament the New Testament shows us that in the person of Jesus God was establishing a greater temple. A place where his glory would dwell on earth.

Where God and humanity would meet and be reconciled for all eternity. Jesus said in John chapter 2 he said destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.

[17:56] And the people couldn't figure out what he meant. But John says he was speaking about the temple of his own body. At Jesus' baptism the heavens were torn open and the glory of God descended in the form of a dove on Jesus.

At Jesus' crucifixion the earth shook. And after his resurrection we see Jesus the risen Lord breathing peace on his disciples.

sending his spirit upon them sending them out to the ends of the earth to gather in people from all nations. You see the New Testament says that we who believe in Jesus are God's temple.

That God now lives in us by his spirit. But the temple isn't a physical building but it's a community of people who are filled with the spirit of God.

Through Jesus we have peace with God we're now his ambassadors extending that grace and peace to the world. And the book of Revelation speaks of a future day.

[19:01] It says there'll be a day when there'll be a great multitude that no one can count from every tribe and every language and every nation and every people who will stand before the throne of God and of the Lamb King Jesus.

And this Jesus will one day make all things new. And God will dwell with us forever and wipe every tear away from our eyes and the new Jerusalem will be a temple filled with the glory of God. The kings of the earth will bring their glory and honor into it and a river of life will run through it.

And on either side of the river the tree of life and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. And it says we will see his face and there will be no more night for the Lord God will be our light and we will reign with him forever and ever.

God says this is what I'm going to do with you in the future. This is why you can be confident that I'm with you in the present as you build the house of the Lord even if it looks small and shabby right now.

God said I'm committed to building a glorious temple with my treasured possession my people from all the nations of the earth for all eternity. So if you're making slow progress in your life as a Christian if you're discouraged by slow progress in the church in loving one another and building one another up in sharing the hope of Jesus Christ with our city and our world if you're discouraged by slow progress don't project your present circumstances onto the future and remain despondent and apathetic but listen to what God has promised to do for you through you to you with you let God's future promises shape your present experience and the New Testament says this too 1 John chapter 3 he says beloved we are God's children now and what we will be has not yet appeared but we know that when he appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is and everyone who has this hope in him purifies themselves just as he is pure

[21:14] I urge the people be strong and work on the temple in Jerusalem because that temple was a physical sign of God's promise to one day fill his temple with glory and peace and as followers of Jesus our job is not to build a physical temple our job is to build up the people of God and even though that's sometimes a slow and difficult process it's all worth it because God has promised us a glorious future so God encourages us despite our slow progress in the present that's the first thing second we see that God encourages us despite our lingering defilements from the past this is verse 10 through 19 verse 10 through 14 Haggai had a dialogue with some of the priests it might seem confusing at first like some obscure bible trivia but the basic point is this contamination spreads purity doesn't if you have

Ebola virus you are a danger to anyone that you come in close contact with if you are in good health unfortunately you can't pass that on just by touching someone else but the point is what he said in verse 14 he says the people were spiritually contaminated they were polluted they were defiled they were unclean in their hearts and so everything they did was contaminated by their idolatry by their sin their work was contaminated their worship offerings were contaminated nothing they did was pure because their hearts weren't right with God it's the same thing he said in chapter 1 he said your priorities are out of whack you've disobeyed God's command and to build a temple and it shows how little you care about him verse 15 through 17 he reminded them how their misplaced priorities has resulted in frustration and curse sent by God himself but then in verse 18 and 19

Haggai unexpectedly turns a corner he says consider from this day onward it's the same word that he used back in chapter 1 when he said consider your ways consider your misplaced priorities consider how your life is not going well because your priorities are not right but then he says consider God's priorities consider from this day onward consider verse 19 from this day on I will bless you it's a strike see the book of Haggai is not just about our priorities it's also about God's priorities and God is saying my priority is to bless you to care for you to restore you it's a striking transition in this section from confronting the people about how spiritually contaminated they are and how devastating the effects of that is to promising from this day on

I will bless you they had begun rebuilding the temple they had begun responding in obedience to God's word but they were still dealing with the lingering pollution from their past can you identify with that are you haunted by lingering defilement from your past do you look back to a time when you were a slave to addiction deceiving and being deceived hated by others and hating one another being foolish and disobedient and led astray and even if you're not using anymore do you feel discouraged and defeated and despairing when you look at the wreckage caused by your past life or are you living in shame because you've defiled your body you've secretly indulged in behavior that you know is not pleasing to God and some days in your mind you may try to justify it other days you may try to forget about it but deep down you still feel dirty and when Paul says present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to

God that seems like an impossible demand instead of a joyful response to God's liberating mercy friends if that's you if you're haunted by lingering defilement from the past there is good news for you the Bible says that Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice who has taken our sin and guilt and shame upon himself and carried it away in his death on the cross and now he stands as the risen and victorious Lord who promises to all who turn to him from this day forward I will bless you you see Jesus Christ is a rebuilders of broken lives he's the redeveloper who loves to buy boarded up houses in bad neighborhoods not so he can move far away and make lots of money by renting out substandard apartments as an absentee landlord but so he can move in and renovate them personally and reside in them himself and shine light into the whole neighborhood as a result that's what he's done with you and me with anyone who turns to

[26:50] Jesus in faith he's bought us with his very own blood he's come to live in us by his spirit personally so that we might be channels of his blessing to the world and so that we might be part of the eternal city that he is building yes the road ahead may be long you may still be reaping painful results of what you have sown in the past Haggai acknowledged this verse 19 he was speaking exactly three months after they started rebuilding the temple on the 24th day of the ninth month and he said is the seed in the barn yet none of your trees have yielded anything in other words the people had obeyed God for three months and on the outside nothing seemed to have got better in their life that Haggai said just wait you see Haggai was speaking in December the ninth month of the

Israelite calendar and in the agricultural rhythm of ancient Israel they would sow the seed for the following year in October and November after the harvest in August and September and from December through February they were the cold months and the seed would lie dormant in the ground and only in March and April and after that would they see the result Haggai was saying just wait God is determined to bless you and a plentiful harvest is to come the apostle Paul says the same thing in Galatians he says if we sow to the spirit we will from the spirit reap eternal life he says so let us not become weary in doing good for in due season we will reap a harvest of holiness if we do not give up see God encourages us despite our slow progress in the present despite our lingering defilements from the past and finally God encourages us despite our dim prospects for the future this is the end of the chapter verses 20 through 23

Haggai concludes with a word to Zerubbabel who was the governor of Judah and Zerubbabel had a glorious lineage in the past he was descended from King David the grandson of King Jehoiachin one of the last kings of Israel he had survived the Babylonian exile but his personal prospects for the future would have seemed dim he was not the king of an independent nation he was the governor of a minor outlying province in the Persian empire he had no empire to rule no palace to reign from no fortified city to defend he was responsible for governing a bunch of refugees and rural poor people who were periodically harassed by their northern neighbors and he was subject at any time to the shifting demands of his Persian superiors it wasn't exactly an enviable job but Haggai spoke his final words directly to this man verses 21 and 22 he says to Zerubbabel

I want you to know that I'm going to bring judgment on this wicked world he uses the same language that was used back in the exodus about when Pharaoh and his armies were and their horses and chariots and riders were pursuing the Israelites to capture them and enslave them and they were drowned in the Red Sea God says I will bring judgment on this wicked world but he said verse 23 on that day I will take you my servant and make you like a signet ring for I have chosen you he says to Zerubbabel your personal prospects for the future may look dim but in God's great redemptive plan you have a glorious destiny just like I took David from the humble obscure task of tending sheep in the middle of nowhere to become a great king of Israel I will take you as my own just like

I called David my servant you too will be my servant I will make you like a signet ring for I have chosen you a signet ring bore the owner's name and mark it signified a close relationship even a bestowal of the owner's authority two generations back the prophet Jeremiah had pronounced God's judgment on Zerubbabel's grandfather Jehoiachin for his wickedness and Jeremiah said though Jehoiachin were the signet ring on my right hand I would tear you off and give you into the hand of those who seek your life Jehoiachin was removed from his position of authority and taken into exile but here Haggai says that judgment is now reversed the exile was God's judgment on the wicked kings and the rebellious people of Israel but it was a temporary judgment and not a final one in other words he's saying

[32 : 21] God's not done with you yet despite appearances I'm not done with the royal line of David because I promised to him long ago that his throne would be established forever and I don't go back on my promises even if it appears that I do I will not now Zerubbabel didn't become king in fact we're not quite sure what happened to him after the temple was rebuilt but he did have a royal destiny in God's great redemptive plan he became an ancestor of Jesus himself Matthew chapter one he's right there in the genealogy of Jesus in that line leading up to the promised king the promised savior the promised deliverer maybe your personal prospects for the future looked in maybe you're in a dead end job subject to unpredictable demands from your supervisors in charge of people with lots of difficult problems maybe your hopes and ideals of a family have fallen to pieces maybe you're literally a refugee struggling to survive in a foreign land maybe you're facing death itself but brothers and sisters in

God's great redemptive plan you have a glorious destiny because in Jesus Christ God says I've chosen you to be my servant you're precious to me and I love you I've placed my signet ring my name my image my mark on you this is the word of the Lord of hosts so to begin this new year brothers and sisters let us be encouraged be encouraged despite slow progress in the present be encouraged despite lingering defilements from the past be encouraged despite dim prospects for the future because God is with us and we have a glorious destiny in Jesus Christ let's pray a prayer for the new year oh Lord length of days does not profit me except the days are passed in your presence in your service to your glory give me your grace that goes before me that follows me that guides sustains sanctifies and helps me every hour that I might not live one moment apart from you but may rely on your spirit to supply every thought speak in every word direct every step prosper every work build up every mustard seed of faith and give me a desire to show forth your praise and testify your love and advance your kingdom

I launch my boat on the unknown waters of this year with you oh father as my harbor with you oh son as my helm with you oh holy spirit filling my sails guide me to heaven with my lamp burning my ear open to your call my heart full of love my soul free give me your grace to sanctify me your comforts to cheer your wisdom to teach your right hand to guide your counsel to instruct your law to judge your presence to stabilize may your fear be my awe and your triumphs my joy amen