

Responding To God

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I. The Context

- A. The southern kingdom of Judah had just undergone judgment having spent 70 years captive in Babylon.
- B. Returned to rebuild the Temple, but encountered opposition.
- C. Interpreted the situation as indicating God must not want the work to proceed.
- D. Progress languished, God was neglected, focus turned to personal goals.

II. Haggai 1:12-15

- A. Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him; and the people feared the presence of the LORD. Then Haggai, the LORD'S messenger, spoke the LORD'S message to the people, saying, "I [*am*] with you, says the LORD." So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius. (Haggai 1:12-15)
- B. Like the passage, my message today is very simple.
 - 1. Our problems can stem from a lack of knowledge of God.
 - 2. Yet even when we come to know the message of God—as this nation has—there remains the issue of our response to that knowledge: what do we do with what God has revealed?
 - 3. Even when God's message eclipses the other distractions so as to enter our eyes and ears, there is still the matter of piercing our hearts!
 - 4. More often than not, it is *this* which prevents us from turning to God with our whole heart: we simply do not want to obey!
 - 5. God's Word and His messengers can talk until they are blue in the face, but if the seed falls on concrete, no response will be forthcoming!
 - 6. It behooves us to pay attention to the simplicity of what took place in the time of Haggai resulting in the restoration of Godly priorities and restitution by God.
- C. Passage records three important stages in God's dealing with men: 1) rebuke; 2) response; 3) restoration.

III. Rebuke

- A. Last week, we saw that the nation was experiencing various symptoms of lack: working hard, but gaining little, even losing that which they had.
 - 1. As if "'fate' had turned against them." (But we don't believe in 'fate!')
- B. Treating symptoms is ineffective: there is an ultimate need to get to the root cause.
 - 1. God's dutiful response to disobedience: removing His blessing, even bringing a curse—actively *interfering* with their prosperity and well-being.
 - a) "He who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes." (Hag. 1:6)
 - b) "You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away." (Hag. 1:9)
 - c) Would God do this to His people? [YES!]
- C. Symptoms are important—a first step in recognizing the problem.
 - 1. But don't stop there!
 - 2. Can distract from the root cause.
 - 3. The symptoms get our attention, but they are not the root cause!
 - 4. God often uses symptoms because of our misplaced priorities.
 - a) The people cared more about their physical prosperity than their relations with God.
 - b) We can ignore spiritual malaise for an extended period and, if we prove to be spiritually torpid, then God resorts to physical communication.
 - (1) Hunger, thirst, cold, discomfort. Even loss of "net worth!"
 - (2) Distracted by chasing after wealth, what better way to get our attention than to take it away after we've worked so hard to earn it?
 - (3) We are not the source of our prosperity: He is!
 - 5. "Consider your ways!" (Hag. 1:5:7)

IV. Response

- A. The passage before us today records the response of the people to the message of God (Hag. 1:12).
- B. Three different parties are singled out:
 - 1. "Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel" - representing governmental rule.
 - a) A descendant in the kingly line of David and grandson of Jehoiachin, one of the last ungodly kings prior to the nation being taken away to Babylon (1Chr. 3:17 cf. Hag. 1:1).
 - 2. "Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest" - representing spiritual rule.
 - 3. "All the remnant of the people"

- C. Responsibility extends to both leadership and the common people.
1. Leadership has greater influence, and therefore, the greater responsibility to lead the nation in a path which is responsive to the truths of God.
 2. Leaders, as great as their influence may be, cannot turn a nation on their own: repentance and change must germinate in the common man in the street.
- D. Motivation for response.
1. A belief that God Has spoken.
 - a) "the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him" (Hag. 1:12)
 - b) How is God speaking in our day?
 - (1) Through His Word.
 - (2) Through chosen vessels who are compelled to preach and teach its truths.
 - (3) Through events, just like in the time of Haggai.
 - c) Where the view arises that God is no longer speaking or that He is not involved in the prosperity or downfall of nations—even by way of the physical realm—then motivation will be lacking.
 - (1) God's Word considered irrelevant or as "holy" as swiss cheese: moth-eaten fables and riddled with errors.
 - (2) Mother earth and environmental concerns, but as if God is no longer controller of His physical domain!
 - (3) We are urged to "care for Mother earth" while we ignore and even thumb our nose at "Father God," the very Creator of this fish bowl we find ourselves swimming in.
 2. Fear of God.
 - a) "the people feared the presence of the LORD" (Hag. 1:12)
 - b) God uses both the carrot and the stick.
 - (1) He draws us by communicating His great love for us, His desire and ability to bless, and the simplicity by which our obedience leads to His blessings falling upon us.
 - (2) It is so simple! Yet in the face of our dark hearts, we turn away, time and time again.
 - (3) So, out of still greater love, God turns to the stick. He loves us too much to simply let us walk away in indifference and darkness.
 - (a) . . . "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." (Heb 12:5b-6)
 - c) The people of Haggai's day responded out of fear of God's visitation in judgment.

- (1) The people feared "from the face" of YHWH.
 - (2) God's presence descended on Mt. Sinai:
Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." (Ex 20:18-19)
 - (3) Among Moses' final words to Israel prior to his death:
"Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who *is* within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, "and *that* their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess." (De 31:12-13)
 - (4) Peter speaking to the household of Cornelius:
"But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. (Ac 10:35)
- d) Where is our fear of God?
- (1) Do we, as a nation fear Him? [NO]
 - (2) Are we, a nation which "works righteousness"? [NO]
 - (3) Do we, as believers within the church fear Him?
 - (a) Our actions and the lyrics of many of our modern worship songs betray our cavalier approach to God.
 - (b) To many, He's just a "big man," a "big buddy in the sky" who's main purpose in life is to ministry to ME.
 - (c) His holiness, perfection, and power are too often eclipsed by a wash of sentimentalism which fails to recognize that we are a people of unclean lips (Isa. 6:5) dependent upon the grace and mercy of a God who is described as a "consuming fire" (Ex. 24:17)
- e) Take note: the people of Haggai's day *feared* His presence! Can we say the same?
- (1) Writer of Hebrews:
Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire. (Heb 12:28-29)

V. Restoration

- A. The leaders and the people
 1. Believed that God had spoken.
 2. Agreed in their hearts that God's assessment of their condition was accurate.

3. Responded in obedience to what God had revealed.
 - a) Their response was like those who heard Peter preach on the day of Pentecost: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?" (Ac 2:36-37)
4. This is always the pattern we find in true Biblical repentance and restoration:
 - a) Believe God has spoken.
 - b) Agree with God has said— that His Words, rather than our own perceptions, are accurate!
 - c) Respond in obedience: a desire to do that which God explains!

B. The response by God

1. "Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, spoke the LORD's message to the people, saying "I am with you, says the LORD."
 - a) WOW!
 - b) God is a god of encouragement! If we would just agree and turn, then He can be counted as faithful to show us the road out of our pit.
 - c) When we have rejected God and things go from bad to worse, Satan and our own conscience can condemn us and push us in a direction even farther from God. But God says, "I AM WITH YOU"!
 - (1) He always, always, always wants us to choose the fork in the road leading toward healing and restoration.
2. We also read:

"So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the remnant of the people" (Hag. 1:14)

 - a) God stirred up their spirits in response.
 - (1) Stem of the Hebrew verb identifies the subject as the cause of the action: "God caused [them] to wake up"
 - (2) Their spirits had been torpid, languishing, as if asleep.
 - (3) It does not say, "they awoke and shook off their slumber". God Himself initiated a response within their spirits bringing about a desire to respond and obey.
 - (4) The meager response on the part of the people of God was met by God's grace to enable them to obey His voice.
 - (5) Examples

- (a) The very act which resulted in the Jews being in Jerusalem to begin this work of rebuilding the temple was initiated by God moving the spirits of men.
 - i) God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia to issue the proclamation that the Jews could return to their land (2Chr. 36:22; Ezra 1:1).
 - ii) God stirred up the spirit of the people who returned from Babylon: "Then the heads of fathers' households of Benjamin and Judah and the priests and the Levites arose, even everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up and rebuild the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem." (Ezra 1:5).

(b) New Testament

- i) Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom [*be*] glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)

3. The need of revival by God followed by His further empowerment.

a) David recognized this same truth in Psalm 138

"In the day when I cried out, You answered me, [*And*] made me bold [*with*] strength in my soul. . . . Though the LORD [*is*] on high, Yet He regards the lowly; But the proud He knows from afar. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand Against the wrath of my enemies, And Your right hand will save me." (Psalms 138:3-7)

(1) Become lowly of mind (but as a nation, we are still proud: "the power of pride").

(2) Cry out to God (but as a nation, we are still relying on our own capabilities).

(3) He answers.

(4) He revives.

(5) He saves.

C. The result of having their spirits stirred by God: the ability and motivation to obey God's command.

1. ". . . and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God." (Hag. 1:14)
2. Their response in obedience (recorded in verse 14) is said to have been on the twenty-fourth day of the same month as the message initially came to Haggai (in verse 1).
 - a) 21 days had elapsed between the time Haggai received the message and the people began to work on the Temple
 - b) Why the delay?

- (1) Some suggest that they were making preparations to rebuild—but wouldn't that have been considered the beginning of the work itself?
- (2) Another possibility: since it was late September, perhaps they were working taking in the harvest?¹ Could it be that an unusually meager harvest served to further confirm the message given by Haggai?
 - (a) "For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and oil, on whatever the ground brings forth . . ." (Hag. 1:11)

VI. How Do We Compare To Israel In Haggai's Day

- A. Are we not experiencing similar symptoms, both personally and nationally in our day?
- B. As we considered last week, there are ample reasons why God would withdraw His hand of blessing and even actively move in opposition to us.
- C. But, are we as responsive as Israel was to Haggai's call to repentance?
- D. It is my contention that we are not. We are still blinded by pride coupled with a belief that we are captains of our own destiny. We are unable to take the two most critical steps described by David in Psalm 138:
 1. Become lowly of mind (but as a nation, we are still proud: "the power of pride").
 2. Cry out to God (but as a nation, we are still relying on our own capabilities).
- E. Until we do so, we can't expect the three responses on the part of God:
 1. He answers.
 2. He revives.
 3. He saves.
- F. Jesus taught a parable concerning humility which we would do well to consider.
 1. Recorded in the 18th chapter of Luke, it concerns a self-righteous Pharisee and a despised tax-collector and compares their interaction with God.
 2. "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:10-14)
 3. Which man depicts our nation? Which man depicts us as individuals?

¹ Bible Knowledge Commentary.

4. What could be more beautiful than the simplicity of a proud and once-powerful nation admitting our fault before the Lord and turning to Him, first individually and then nationally, for cleansing and restoration?
5. As in the days of Haggai, would He not also respond and come to our rescue?