

DECEMBER 20

The next two prophets served the first wave of exiles from Babylon who were trying to rebuild the temple. Ezra mentions both Haggai and Zechariah in Ezra 5:1 and Ezra 16:14. The time was about 18 years after the exiles returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel. They were commanded to rebuild the temple and they began with zeal; but under the pressure of their neighbors, the rebuilding had come to a standstill. If you reread some of Ezra you'll see that the Jews were forced to stop building. For some reason this time of Haggai was a critical time in the lives of the returned exiles. Ezra wasn't there yet, nor was Nehemiah. Suddenly Haggai appeared with four short messages all within a few months. Amazingly the leaders sprang to life. Then before Haggai gave his final address, Zechariah began to preach. Zechariah is an unusual prophet and what he says will look like the book of Revelation. What is interesting is that Haggai's last messages also look to the end times. For some reason this was a very critical time and as we saw with Zephaniah, in order to inspire hope, the Lord lifted their eyes to the prize of what their earthly labor was working toward: the redemption of man and the coming King.

There are two charts at the end of this document that might help you understand where Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi fit in the Old Testament. These charts are "The Three Returns from Exile," and "Chronology of the Postexilic Period." And you also will find one other chart that is focused on Haggai and Zechariah, "Dates of Key Events in Haggai's and Zechariah's Time."

Haggai 1-2

Haggai 1

V. 1 This Darius was not the Darius from Daniel 6. This is now 18 years later. Darius was a popular name among the Persians and Medes, sort of like names for popes.

Notice that the message is to Zerubbabel and to Joshua.

Zerubbabel was the governor and in the line of David. Wait until you see the good things God says about him in Haggai and then in Zechariah.

Joshua the high priest appears in a very dramatic scene in Zechariah.

To get your bearings here notice when this first message was given. Now go to 2:10 where the day of the final two messages is given. As far as we know, Haggai's ministry lasted only three months, but not without impact.

Vs. 2-11 Remember that this message was given to these two leaders. As I read this, this sounds so much like what any of us are prone to do in the western world. The harvest is difficult, but going to church and living in comfort is so easy. Yet, our lives are so barren of fruit. To draw close to God as a disciple means you will have to become dissatisfied with a lack of fruit. Verse 8 reminds me of John 15:8.

Vs. 12-15 This was a miracle and shows the power of God in Haggai's message. It also shows the hearts of Zerubbabel and Joshua as godly leaders. It just makes you happy to read this.

Haggai 2

Vs. 1-9 This message comes a month into their work on the temple and they were discouraged. How could this temple compare to the glorious temple of Solomon? The Lord tells Zerubbabel and Joshua to be encouraged and keep working. Then in vs. 6-9, God gives them a hint of the coming glory of the millennial temple. God lifts their eyes from that temple to the future temple to strengthen their hands. This is a very direct and heartfelt word to these two men.

It should also be noted that Ezekiel had already completed his book and I'm sure it was in print. Joshua would have brought a copy with him. They would have read about the millennial temple

in Ezekiel 40. God, through Haggai, was reminding them that whatever was on earth now was only a frail copy of what would be in the future.

Vs. 10-19 This message is directed to the priests to remain holy, personally and in their attitudes. The people might have "let down" regarding rebuilding the temple, but the priests and Levites couldn't let down in their holiness before God and in leading the people. God marks this day as the day He will begin to bless the exiles for their obedience. It is interesting that the promise of blessing was marked with the spiritual reform of the leaders.

Vs. 20-23 This is the same day, and the message is only for Zerubbabel. The best guess is that this blessing is still waiting for fulfillment in the Millennium. Zerubbabel was true to God and there will be a reward. Since we know that the resurrected David will lead Israel in the Millennial Kingdom, it is thought that Zerubbabel will also be raised to work and govern under David as part of this reward. After this time of Haggai and Zechariah, we hear nothing more about Zerubbabel. He was not present when Ezra arrived 62 years later or when Nehemiah arrived 76 years later.

Reading these prophets, it makes me aware of how important it is to live closely with the Lord in faith, to keep the end in view and to stay motivated in the harvest. God showed these leaders what they were working for, lifting their vision beyond their challenges and beyond their generation. Their work was adding to the coming day of redemption for all peoples and nations. That is exactly what we are working toward too, as we follow Jesus in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples.

Revelation 11

Just as chapter 10 showed a heavenly event that will signify a change from the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation to the next 3.5 years, chapter 11 shows us what has happened on earth as this change has taken place.

Vs. 1-2 The temple will be rebuilt in the first 3.5 years of peace in Jerusalem. Now a change has taken place and the nations will trample Jerusalem for the next 3.5 years. It is exactly at the midpoint of the Tribulation that the antichrist will come into the temple, defile it and stop the worship. Both Daniel and Jesus spoke of this.

V. 3 Now we learn about the two witnesses. Notice that their ministry was for 3.5 years, that is, the first half of the Tribulation. I think it is obvious that neither the antichrist nor the nations could run amok in Jerusalem with these guys on the loose. No one knows who these two guys are, but since it says in Hebrews that you only die once, it seems a good guess to think these might be two guys in the OT who never died, Enoch and Elijah. Or, of course, they could just be two other guys, like Fred and Ralph.

Vs. 4-6 In Zechariah 4:2-14 we see Zerubbabel and Joshua referred to in the same way. The idea is that they bore witness in their generation in giving light like lampstands, and both are empowered by the Holy Spirit, as seen in the oil of the olive tree.

Notice that these guys can call down disaster and no one can stand against them. I think, as the seals are being broken and the trumpets are sounding in heaven, these guys are on earth calling down all the judgments just like Moses and Aaron did. This means that they work in the first 3.5 years.

Vs. 7-10 My sense is that the angel's declaration in chapter 10 will introduce the mystery of God, allowing His followers to conquer Satan by the sacrifice and testimony of their lives for Christ. This mystery will begin on earth with the deaths of these two men. It reminds me of Herod laying hands on the apostles in Acts 12. God allowed it, but it only advanced the gospel.

You've got to admit this sounds funny, that people in the world will be so happy that these guys are dead that they will give gifts. That will make it a real "black Friday." I wonder if they'll put

up their Christmas trees. I'll bet there will be fantastic discounts. Even though it has been said, and people know in their hearts, that what has happened is the judgment of God as written in the Bible, they will only think about those two guys. They won't see God. They will think that if they kill the messengers, God will go away.

Think of what has happened with all of the seals and the trumpets. Over half of the earth's population is dead. A third of the land of the earth is scorched. A third of the fresh water is poisoned; a third of the ocean is poisoned, and a third of the world's fleet of ships is gone. There is war and famine all over the planet. Think of how long it took to clean up after Katrina hit the Gulf States in the U.S., with all of the U.S.'s resources. The earth will be totally wrecked for those last 3.5 years and everything will finally resemble an apocalyptic landscape. Without technology, utilities and the ability to make gasoline, we'll all be on equal footing. The earth will be happy these guys are dead and the antichrist and his beast will be very popular, with action figures and TV interviews, etc....

We don't see it yet, but the fact that just a third of everything was destroyed was still God's mercy in trying to wake people up to the judgments yet to come. People could have still repented. In some way this is a very crucial time while there is still the chance to come to God because things will get worse. The hearts of people will now be totally revealed and most will become totally hardened.

Vs. 11-13 Apparently this will be televised. Notice that this is resurrection, but after 3.5 days, it is the total recreation of their bodies. Also, notice that if people are giving glory to God, they are believing.

I would say it is after this that the antichrist takes his place in the temple, declaring himself to be God or the messiah, with a small "m." You have to admit, showing his muscle like this would make a convincing argument that he is the king ant on the ant hill, except that it's just an ant hill.

Vs. 15-19 The death of the witnesses begins the second 3.5 years. The seventh angel blows his trumpet and it is declared that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ."

Notice that the *ark of the covenant* is there in the heavenly temple. As important as the ark of the covenant was in the days from Moses to David, it was lost sometime before the Babylonian captivity. In order for Josiah to have sacrificed, he would have needed the ark. It talks about all of the things that Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple, but it never mentions the ark. I know some people think Indiana Jones found it, and obviously Israel had to make another ark for Ezra's generation and for the generation in Jesus' day, but I wonder if this is the missing ark and God took it before the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar. Just speculation.

This is a solemn moment and there is worship, but what really happens here? Jesus doesn't return at this point and there are still events taking place and there are yet seven bowls of judgment to be poured out. There are still 3.5 years of what will now be referred to as the "Great Tribulation."

It seems to me that God is showing the power of His righteousness and the proof of forgiveness and redemption by allowing the world to be "judged," or "conquered" by the saints. What better proof to the success of the work you have done than to let the finished product speak for itself. The next chapters should make this more evident that God is giving up His own people as proof of the power of salvation in Christ. These people will carry their cross daily and most will be giving up their lives for their Savior.

As we read these next chapters it looks pretty grim for the followers of Jesus. But imagine going through all of this and having the playbook in hand. I'm sure there will be some desperate moments, but I'll bet there will be some Spirit-inspired joy and courage like the world has never seen. Everything that Jesus said should be true of a disciple will be alive and lived through those followers. They will not fear in their deaths and they will give up testimony as they are removed

from the earth and enter into life. That is how we need to be working now in the harvest. We have far less to be anxious about than they'll have, and we have the same assurance that we are in the Lord's hands as we work in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

Psalm 139

As you read this psalm for the second time this year, think of how your understanding or feeling for what David is saying might be different because of what you have read since then.

Vs. 1-6 Verse 6 is the climax here. God knows us intimately, completely, and intricately. In faith we can rejoice in this knowledge, knowing God has cleansed us in Jesus Christ; otherwise, this would be pretty scary.

Vs. 7-12 Again, in a heart of faith, this is a major comfort. As Jesus encouraged His disciples that there could be things done to them that would never be known, that they might be killed and there would be no justice, Jesus said to them, *So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.* (Matt. 10:26) Not only does God see, He is there too. We are never alone.

Vs. 13-18 These verses add another dimension to what Paul wrote in Romans 8:29-31, *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

Vs. 19-22 Regarding the lost, we are to love all men and work to see the lost saved and disciples made. Regarding our Father, our prayer is to be, *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.* Among all the things those words mean, they mean judgment to those who rebel against Christ. We are praying for justice, for the light of God to come and for this tragedy to be over.

Vs. 23-24 This is the kind of bold transparency we need each day as we pursue our Lord, following Him in the harvest.

Proverbs 30:15-16

This is a rather striking image for a lack of contentment. As Paul said, *But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.* (1 Timothy 6:6-9)

In this Christmas season, that is a good thought. I'm afraid that for most people and many believers, Christmas and life are reflected in the words of this proverb.