



Walking Thru The Bible HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH And MALACHI

These last three prophets in the Old Testament are from the period following the Babylonian captivity which we often call the "Restoration Period" or post-exilic period. The common message of these prophets was: *return to the right ways of the Lord*.

Haggai and Zechariah were particularly concerned with the rebuilding of the temple which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians nearly 70 years before. The people had been tending to their personal affairs and neglecting the temple and other spiritual responsibilities.

HAGGAI

Haggai has been described as a man with a single ambition. He preached to a poor, discouraged, and frightened people. He attributed their lack of success in all areas of their national life to the single fact of their neglect of the temple. In a bold and authoritative manner, he pleaded for the people to rebuild the temple.

Haggai and Zechariah are credited with getting the temple completed c. 516 BC (Ezra 6:14-15). The dates of Haggai's ministry which is covered in the book is only about four months in the year 520 BC (1:1; 2:1; 2:10; 2:20).

The temple foundation had been laid almost immediately after the exiles returned from Babylon. But then about sixteen years intervened before the work resumed. It took the powerful exhortation of Haggai and Zechariah to motivate Zerubbabel and Jeshua to arise and begin to rebuild the house of God.

Outline of Haggai:

The prophecy consist of four messages to the returned exiles.

1. The first message was a call to rebuild the temple. The people objected saying that the time to rebuild had not come. Haggai answered, "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your ceiled houses, while this house lieth waste?" He delivered a stinging rebuke to the people for seeking to establish their own prosperity while neglecting spiritual responsibilities. The result of this sermon was

that Zerubbabel, Joshua and the remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord and began rebuilding (1:12-15).

2. The second message was designed to encourage the people who had undertaken the rebuilding (2:1-9).

3. The third recalled that sin and impure hearts had brought God's punishment in the past (2:10-14) and promised that obedience and pure hearts would bring divine blessings (2:15-19).

4. The fourth message is a messianic prophecy (2:20-23).

ZECHARIAH

Zechariah was born and reared in Babylon and was among the group that returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel (Neh. 12:1,4,16). He was evidently younger than Haggai and his recorded ministry continued a year or so beyond the record of Haggai.

Under Haggai and Zechariah's preaching the people were stirred to again take up the rebuilding of the temple. While Haggai rebuked and admonished, Zechariah encouraged and looked to brighter days. Their work was fully complementary and compatible.

The book of Zechariah contains many visions and a great deal of apocalyptic symbolism. it is the longest and the most difficult of all the Minor Prophets.

Message of Zechariah:

This book is also divided into four sections.

1. There is a call for repentance (1:1-6).

2. There is a series of night visions about the future of the people of God and his kingdom: (1) riders among the myrtles (1:7-17); (2) four horns and four smiths (1:18-21); (3) the man with a measuring line (2:1-13); (4) Joshua's trial (3:1-10); (5) a golden lampstand and two olive trees (4:1-14); (6) the flying scroll (5:1-4); (7) the woman in the ephah (5:5-11); (8) the four chariots (6:1-8); (9) and the crowning of Joshua (6:9-15).

3. There is a question about fasting raised (7:1-3), and the point is that fasting is useless without obedience (7:4-7). The Lord's expectations of the people are stated (7:8-23).

4. The people of God are reassured about the future. The heathen nations will fall (9:1-7), and the Messiah will appear (9:8-11:17). Salvation will be established in spiritual Israel, the church (12:1-14:21).

MALACHI

Malachi was the last writing prophet to serve God under the Law of Moses. The material within the book parallels the situation described in Nehemiah 13. Nehemiah had served as governor during the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and a few years following. He had returned to Persia to serve the king and in chapter 13 he has returned to serve as governor a second time.

The sins dealt with in Malachi are those found in Nehemiah 13 and thus Malachi may be dated about 433 BC.

Background: The priests were lax and wicked, offerings were being neglected, divorce was common, and justice was being perverted. Malachi's intense love for God and the people of God moved him to speak with great urgency in the streets and market places. Malachi uses a "question-answer" method of preaching.

Malachi challenged the apathy and disloyalty of the people. Poverty and hard times had come. The people were questioning the love of God because of their difficulties and the prophet placed the blame where it really belonged. It was the sin of the people--not the lack of divine love--which was at the root of the problems (cf. Isa. 59:1-2).

Outline of Malachi: The book opens with an affirmation of the love of God for his people (1:1-5) and shows how that love has been spurned (1:6-2:9). A specific rebuke of the people of Malachi's day for their widespread profanation of marriage is given (2:10-16). Finally, the prophet looks forward to the coming of the Messiah.

A Major Message From Malachi:

One of problems besetting the people of Malachi's day is a major problem of our society as well. It is the heartache of unjustified divorce and remarriage. Both the Old and New Testaments allow divorce and remarriage in one extreme case, Deut. 24:1-4; Matt. 5:32; 19:9.

A problem in Malachi's day was that some had married unlawfully to start with and needed to put away those wives (Ezra 10:10-12; Neh. 13:23-31; Deut. 7:3-4). Another problem was some men were beginning to cast aside their lawful wives, and such had to be dealt with also, Mal. 2:14-15.

God's severe attitude toward all such tampering with a divine institution is evident in the statement of the prophets (Mal. 2:16).

A Bag With Holes

"Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." (Haggai 1:6)

Introduction:

1. The historical background to Haggai (Cf. ch. 1).
2. An overview of Haggai's work and results.
 - a. Sixteen years of wasted efforts and fruitless labors.
 - b. Like sand castles by the sea. (I Cor. 3:13).
3. Am I building on a foundation of wood, hay and stubble? Am I putting into a bag with holes?
4. When is life a bag of holes where all efforts are wasted?

I. LIFE WITHOUT CHRIST IS A BAG OF HOLES.

1. In Christ we have all spiritual blessings, Eph. 1:3.
2. Every life outside of Christ is a bag with holes, Psa. 127:1

II. LIFE'S EDUCATION WITHOUT GOD IS A BAG WITH HOLES

1. What price is too great to pay for the safety, welfare and education of our children? Rom. 1:16; Psa. 119:104
2. How Solomon saw it -- (I Kings 4:29-35; Eccl. 1:18)

III. LIFE WITHOUT GOD'S KINGDOM FIRST IS A BAG WITH HOLES

1. How those of Haggai's day lived -- ch.1 vs. 2 Sam.7:2
2. Jesus's declaration in Matt. 6:33

IV. LIFE WITHOUT LAYING UP TREASURES IN HEAVEN IS A BAG WITH HOLES

1. Alexander the Great -- 1 Tim. 6:7
2. Church at Laodicea -- Rev. 3:17 (Abe Lincoln comment)
3. How can we lay up treasures?
4. In Christ we are rich. James 2:5; 1 Thess.3:12; 1 Tim. 6:17-18; 1 Pet.1:3-4; 1 Tim. 6:6; Col. 3:16.

Conclusion:

1. A place where our labor is not in vain! (Rev.14:13; Heb. 6:10)
2. David's observation of prosperity. Psalms 73:17-19. Prosperity without God is putting into a bag with holes.