

Blessings for a Defiled People

- (10) 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,
- (11) “Thus says the LORD of hosts: Ask the priests about the law:
- (12) ‘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 priests answered and said, ‘No.’
- (13) Then Haggai said, ‘If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?’ The priests answered and said, ‘It does become unclean.’
- (14) Then Haggai answered and said, ‘So is it with this people, and so is it with this nation before me, declares the LORD, and so is it with every work of their hands. And what they offer there is unclean.’
- (15) Now then, consider from this day onward. Before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the LORD,
- (16) 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.
- (17) I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and mildew and hail, yet you did not turn to me, declares the LORD.
- (18) 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:

(19) Is the seed yet in the barn? Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yet yielded. From this day on I will bless you.” – *English Standard Version (ESV)*

Refresher

- **First oracle** (Aug 29, 520 BC; 1:1-11) — God rebukes the people for living in comfort while His house is ruined. Agricultural failure is the consequence: “You have sown much, and harvested little.” Refrain: “*Consider your ways*” (*simu levavkhem*).
- **The people obey** (Sept 21, 520 BC; 1:12-15) — The LORD stirs the spirit of Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant. Work on the temple resumes after sixteen years of neglect.
- **Second oracle** (Oct 17, 520 BC; 2:1-9) — Encouragement for those disheartened by the modest new temple: “The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former.”
- **Three months into rebuilding** (Dec 18, 520 BC; 2:10-19) — The third oracle arrives. The altar has been operational for years (Ezra 3:2-6), sacrifices continue, and the people have been obedient since September. The question now: does their work and proximity to the temple restore them? Now we have a transformation: “*Consider your ways*” becomes “*Consider from this day.*”

God and People

1. Holiness is not transmissible
 - Things are made holy by dedication to God, not by nature
 - *besar-qodesh* (“flesh of holiness”) describes meat consecrated through the offering process (Lev 6:25-29)

- the root *q-d-sh* means “separation, apartness” — holiness is a status conferred, not an inherent quality
- Holiness does not transfer outward by contact
 - holy meat carried in the *kanap* (garment fold) cannot sanctify the food it touches (v. 12)
 - “No” (*lo*) is plain, and the *kanap* — symbol of covenant covering (Ruth 3:9) and royal authority (1 Sam 24:4) — here represents the failure of mediation
- Therefore the temple and its rituals cannot sanctify a defiled people
 - the altar had been operational since they returned (Ezra 3:2-6), years of sacrifices by contaminated people were contaminated (v. 14)
 - God calls them *haggoy hazzeh* (“this nation”), reserved for Gentiles, as if their defilement placed them outside covenant holiness

2. Defilement is contagious

- Corpse contamination — the greatest impurity — is the test case
 - *teme’-nephesh* (“unclean of person/soul”) is contamination by contact with a dead body (Num 19:11-22)
 - *nephesh met* (“dead soul/person”) is oxymoronic, since *nephesh* fundamentally denotes life — death is the antithesis of God-given life
- Unlike holiness, impurity transfers by contact — the asymmetry is the theological crux
 - the priests answer *yitma’* (“it shall become unclean”) — emphatic and unqualified, contrast

with the bare *No* of v. 12; impurity is contagious, transferring by contact

- Haggai makes a light-to-heavy argument: if holy meat cannot sanctify, yet contamination can defile: defilement is more powerful than holiness
- The people's defilement therefore contaminates everything they touch
 - the triple *ken* ("so") in v. 14 hammers the application concentrically — "so is this people, and so is this nation, and so is every work of their hands" — widening the scope from people to nation to all their deeds
 - finally, *tame' hu'* ("unclean it is") expresses a timeless, stative reality —offerings are not *becoming* unclean but simply *are* unclean, a permanent condition rather than a transitional process

3. God blesses despite defilement

- The blessing is God's sovereign initiative, not a response to the people's merit
 - *'avarakh* ("I will bless") is a shift from (*hikketi*, "I struck," v. 17); a future blessing encodes the central message: the past was curse, the future will be blessing
 - God declares abundance at the moment of apparent emptiness — the ninth month (Kislev) is after autumn planting but before spring harvest; "Is the seed yet in the barn?" - **negative**, the blessing is announced precisely when nothing is visible
- The passage's structure is a reversal
 - it opens with contamination (vv. 12-14) and closes with consecration (v. 19)

- it transforms from backward-looking (“consider your ways,” 1:5, 7) to forward-looking (“consider from this day,” 2:15, 18)
- a brief promise contrasts with the extended diagnosis: the curse is explained at length while the blessing requires no explanation
- The four crops signal comprehensive covenant restoration
 - vine, fig tree, pomegranate, and olive tree echo Deuteronomy 8:8 — each carries symbolic weight:
 - national vitality (vine, Isa 5:1-7)
 - peace and security (fig, Mic 4:4)
 - temple worship (pomegranate adorned the priestly garment, Exod 28:33-34)
 - consecrated service (olive oil for anointing and the menorah)
 - the quantified curse
 - an escalating pattern — grain halved (20 to 10), wine reduced by 60% (50 to 20)
 - we can expect equal and comprehensive reversal: where diminishment prevailed, abundance will follow