

Shaking the heavens and the earth

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Date: 10 January 2021

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[0 : 00] If you heard last week's message, you'll remember that I described Haggai as a building site. Well, today we are still in the building site, but we're going to go far beyond it.

Why don't you come with me to another building site? This story I'm about to tell you, probably like many preacher stories, is apocryphal, but it does make the point. This building site is London at the end of the 17th century.

Indeed, much of London at that time was a building site because the Great Fire of London had destroyed so many prominent buildings. A passerby stopped at one of these building sites and said to a man, do you enjoy being here?

He said, oh no, I hate it. I hate every minute of it, but I've got a wife and children at home. I've got to feed them. He said to a second man, what are you doing here? He said, well, it's better than just sitting around.

Then he talked to a third man, said to him, what are you here for? And he replied, I am helping Sir Christopher Wren to build St. Paul's Cathedral.

[1 : 09] Now, you can see the point there. He saw beyond the boring, routine, dull, rather back-breaking task to the final result.

Now, of course, we are not helping God to build his temple, but God graciously allows us to be involved in that building. And that really is the point of this second chapter.

It's nearly a month now since the building restarted. And it would be a time when the building had reached the stage when it was particularly tough. Clearing rubble, preparing stones, allocating duties, dull tasks so there was need for encouragement.

And Haggai is giving that encouragement. And just about this time of the second chapter, his companion Zechariah would have joined him as well. The book of Ezra says that the prophets were there helping the builders.

Whether that meant they actually put their backs into the building or whether they simply encouraged, we don't know. But anyway, they were there to encourage people to look beyond.

[2 : 18] That's why I've taken as our title today the phrase that occurs more than once in the chapter, shaking the heavens and the earth. This building on the mountain of Zion was far, far more than a building.

And it was something that was pointing to something much bigger. So let's look at the chapter as it develops in three scenes, so to speak.

And in verses 1 to 9, Haggai says that God's temple will fill the whole earth. All the nations will come. I will shake all nations, verse 7.

What is desired by all nations will come. And I will fill this house with glory. Now, if you read the Bible, you'll find that the temple is one of the big themes that runs right through, one of the binding themes.

Perhaps even at the very beginning, the Garden of Eden is a temple as well as a garden. And that points forward to the new creation. And indeed, one of the prophets, Ezekiel, sees the whole of the new creation as a temple.

[3 : 26] Now, Revelation, look at Revelation, by contrast, says, I saw no temple in the city. Now, that's not a contradiction. It's drawing attention to the same reality. The reality is that the temple is about the presence of God with his people.

The dwelling of God, says John in Revelation, is with his people. All that is good in worship on earth, all that is good in living on earth, will be realized fully in that heavenly temple, living now in anticipation of then.

And in these first verses, the temple filling the whole earth, Haggai says two things, really. Look at verse 3. Who of you has left who saw this house in its former glory?

Does it seem to you like nothing? Because the temple that was built after the exile was nothing like a splendid as Solomon's temple had been.

Indeed, nothing like a splendid as the temple to which Jesus came, because King Herod had spent a great deal of time and energy in beautifying the temple. So don't dwell in the past, says Haggai.

[4 : 42] Don't make unhelpful comparisons. It's not that there's nothing to inspire in the past.

There's much to inspire in the past. But the important thing is not what God did in the past, although hugely important that is.

If you look at verse 4. I am with you, declares the Lord Almighty. God is with us. My spirit remains among you.

We want to build the temple of the Lord in our day. We want to build it by looking to the past.

Inspired by the past. Enthused by the past, but not living in the past.

And the words that the prophet speaks now to Joshua, Be strong, Joshua, son of Josedach. These are the very words that the Lord had spoken to the first Joshua a thousand years before, as he was leading the people into the promised land.

God worked in the past. Worked wonderfully. But God is still at work, and God will still be at work.

So don't glorify and idolize the past and say, Why can't it be like whatever part of the past?

[5 : 57] Why can't it be like Reformation Scotland? Why can't it be like the Billy Graham Crusades and so on? Now, these were both works of God. But the point is, God is still at work, and God will be at work until the temple is built.

And notice there are practicalities here. Verse 8, The silver is mine, and the gold is mine. We read in the book of Ezra, chapter 6, how Darius, the emperor, ordered that money for the temple should be given by the local officials and paid from the taxes.

These very people were trying to prevent it. The emperor overruled, and God provided the gold and the silver. So don't dwell on the past. And secondly, see the bigger picture.

Verse 7, I will shake all nations. The desire, what is desired by all nations will come. And this will happen, says God, because I am working in a little while.

Now, that's language that we must not misuse. A little while in God's timetable, not in ours.

Remember, a day with the Lord is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like a day.

[7 : 15] And the last Narnia quotation for a little while. As Esalen says, in my country, all times are soon. Soon and in a little while.

In apocalyptic means it's absolutely certain to happen. There is no possibility of it not happening. I will shake. And the verb there suggests a series of shakings.

Throughout history, God has intervened and shaken. And shaken nations, shaken people. In Isaiah 60, for example, the prophet says, The glory of the Lord will draw all nations to its light.

And, of course, at the first coming of Jesus, he was taken to the temple as a baby. He appeared again in the temple at the age of 12. And throughout his ministry, he honored the temple because it was built by God.

But he pointed to himself as the true temple. And the true temple, all these glorious things that are shaking all nations, as are by all nations, filling the house with glory, will happen fully when he comes again.

[8 : 27] And in this place, I will grant peace. Verse 9. Peace, of course, is being reconciled with God, with each other. The harmony that comes through the gospel.

And something bigger than that, too. Not joined with all God's people, not just at any given time, but throughout all time and space. And indeed, angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. Difficult sometimes to imagine that, particularly if there are only five or six of us here. But the point is, that is the reality. When we meet, we meet with God's people.

All throughout the world. All throughout time and space. And with the company of heaven. So, the first thing then is the temple will be the whole earth. The whole of the new creation.

Now, secondly, in verses 10 to 19, God's purposes lead to blessing. Now, look at the particularly end of that section in verse 19.

[9 : 30] From this day, I will bless you. Nearly four months have passed since the first message in chapter 1, verses 1 to 2. And two months since the glowing message of shaking the earth in verses 1 to 9.

Now, this seems like a digression in many ways. Now, it's all this about the fall touches some bread or chew some wine, some olive oil. The point is being made here is that the temple of the Lord is a holy place.

Psalms 93:5 says, holiness adorns your house for endless days, O Lord. Revelation 21, verse 27 says, nothing unholy will enter the new Jerusalem.

So, that means there's a need for holiness now. Not simply in the future. Now, we want to remember that the prophets are written to help us to live in this world.

By pointing us to what is to come. I'm sure you know the silly phrase, so-and-so is too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use. I wonder if anyone listening has ever in their life met anyone like that.

[10:51] I certainly haven't. I think the real big problem of all of us as Christians nowadays is the exact opposite. We are too earthly minded. We seldom look beyond this world to the world that's to come.

And there's only two things here, important things that Haggai has to say. In this business about verses 11 to 13, holiness is not automatic.

Holiness doesn't happen by a kind of osmosis. You see, holiness is far too often misunderstood as meaning particularly churchy things.

If we are involved in the church, you're automatically holy. Now, that's simply not true. Doing holy things doesn't mean that we are holy ourselves.

After all, Isaiah the prophet long before had talked about people who were extremely religious, talked about people who were engaging in all the right activities, but they were doing it in the wrong way.

[12:01] Because holiness is not just about what we do when we are at church, so to speak. Holiness is about eating and drinking. Holiness is about attitudes.

Now, holy attitudes will produce holy behavior, but it's easy enough to be externally holy, and yet not holy at all in our thoughts, in our feelings, in our attitudes.

And then Haggai says, Be discerning. Give careful thought. Verse 15. Consider this, the need for repentance. And basically, this is picking up what he said in chapter 1, verses 7 to 11, that because they're neglecting the law, the whole of their lives have gone wrong.

Nothing is working for them. And building the temple, it's not just putting up stones. It's not just about mortar and life and so on.

It's about lives which honor God and place him at the center. And that's why in verse 19 he says, From this day I will bless you.

[13:20] What that means in immediate terms, he's going to give them good harvests. He's going to bless their economic activities. But then remember the harvest is used in the Bible as a picture of the end of the age.

Jesus tells the parable of the harvest and says the harvest is the end of the age. And some of the prophets use this as well. And what he's saying here is that material blessings, as well as spiritual blessings, anticipate the life to come.

This is not a kind of otherworldly shadow existence. The good creation that God has made, although it's now fallen, anticipates the world that is to come.

And what we do as we build the temple of God, not just in church, not just at meetings, but in our daily lives, this anticipates the day when the temple, the whole of creation, will be blessed.

So, the temple where heaven touches earth will be the whole earth, the whole of creation. God's purposes lead to blessing.

[14:30] And then the final verses, verses 20 to 23, God's purposes will certainly be fulfilled, and they will be fulfilled exactly as he said they would be.

It ends on a high note. The word of the Lord came to Haggai, tells Rebutal, governor of Judah, I'm going to shake the heavens and the earth. Now, Rebutal is not one of the big players in the biblical story, and yet he's the leader of the community, and he is the representative of David.

That is the point. God's promises to David are going to be fulfilled, just as God's promises to Moses are going to be fulfilled, just as every promise he has made is going to be fulfilled.

And that's why it repeats once again, I'm going to shake the heavens and the earth. Now, this building on Mount Zion, and this tiny province, did not seem to be fulfilling that.

But notice he's going to say, all other powers will be overthrown. Verse 22, I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms.

[15 : 44] I will overthrow chariots and the drivers, horses and the riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother. Now, looking at what was happening there, from the point of view of the great and the good, this was a tiny province.

David's empire had stretched from the Nile to the Euphrates, while filling the promise to Abraham. That was not happening now, was it? Tiny province, and it remained a province.

And when the Messiah came, it was still a province, this time of Rome. That's because something much bigger is in view than even David's empire.

David's empire, great as it was, was only in anticipation of what would happen when the whole world became the temple of God, when the whole world became the kingdom of God.

Chariots, drivers, horses, risers, these are symbols of human power, which so often it becomes self-sufficient. And just as this province looked weak, just as the room of Baal did not really recall David in many ways, yet the promise was going to be fulfilled because the Messiah was going to come on that day, declares the Lord Almighty, I will take you, my servant, Sir Woodwell.

[17 : 13] Now, my servant is a phrase that's used throughout the Bible, but it's regularly used in the Old Testament, particularly of two people, Moses and David.

And of course, Isaiah the prophet talks about the servant from the line of David, the servant who will bring about the purposes of God and who will bring in the kingdom.

And that phrase, on that day, verse 23, often notice this in the prophets before, that's the day of the Lord. The day of the coming of the kingdom.

And the signet ring was worn by the king either on his finger or a chain around his neck. And on that day, I will take my servant.

This is going far beyond Zerubbabel. It's going far beyond David even. This is the servant who is going to carry out God's purposes, who is going to fulfill the promises here in Haggai and in other prophets.

[18 : 20] God will be God and the world will know it. That's the persistent message of the prophets. If we go forward to the time of the Messiah's coming, when he comes once again, he comes in weakness.

The servant grows up like a root out of a dry ground. dry ground is not normally who you'd expect vegetation to grow. He suffers, he dies, and yet he rises again.

And when he rose again, just as he was about to ascend to heaven, hearing about this in Acts chapter 1, the disciples understandably say to him, Lord, are you now going to restore the kingdom to Israel?

But after all, that has been persistently promised throughout the Old Testament. The Messiah will come, the kingdom will come, and he will reign on David's throne forever.

It's very interesting what Jesus says. He doesn't say you're talking nonsense. He says, you haven't grasped just how big the picture is. The kingdom will come, but it's going to be far bigger than national Israel.

[19 : 36] That's why you've got to go to Jerusalem, to Judea, and beyond the ancient kingdom to the ends of the earth. Because this gospel, this message, is for the whole people.

The temple which is to be built, and the apostles talk about this, Peter and Paul talk about this, this temple will be all the people of God who will live with God in the new creation.

So you see, this book, when I first read the book of Haggai, I thought, how dull this is. As I began to study it, and began particularly the second chapter to see, this is something far bigger than we can ever imagine.

Because God will be God, and the world will know it. let's pray. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine, according to his power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, now and in eternity.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.