

# BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: HAGGAI

## HAGGAI

### PREFACE

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Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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*Duncan Heaster*

## HAGGAI CHAPTER 1

Haggai Chapter 1

Haggai 1:1 *In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month-*

Haggai prophesied at the time when the Jews had been told to cease rebuilding the temple (Ezra 5:1). We might expect the message of Haggai to have been "Have faith! Keep building although you've been told to stop, God will be with you, all will be good in the end". Instead Haggai focuses upon the spiritual weakness and poor motivation of the Jews and appeals for their repentance. This would suggest that the real reason God allowed the command to cease building was because He was only confirming the Jews in their lack of desire to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem.

The many restoration prophecies had stated that the Jews would return from Babylon after Babylon had fallen and restore God's Kingdom in Judah under a Messianic ruler. Ez. 40-48 contains commands more than predictions of how a temple system would be rebuilt, with a "Prince" who was also a priest as the Messianic leader. They would repent and enter a new covenant which would replace the old covenant. Tragically, most of the Jews preferred the soft life of Babylon, and those who did return were impenitent and are revealed by Haggai, Malachi, Ezra and Nehemiah as seeking their own personal gain from emigration to Judah.

And so the prophecies were rescheduled and reapplied. There is an element to which they will come literally true in the last days when latter day Babylon falls, a remnant of Judah repent, and the Lord Jesus returns to earth to re-establish God's Kingdom on earth based in Israel. But they are also reinterpreted in many New Testament passages which allude to the restoration prophecies, being reapplied to Christian believers entering the new covenant and coming out of 'Babylon' in a more spiritual sense.

Some exiles did return and began rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. But they were several times interrupted by seemingly invincible opposition from the local peoples and the king of Persia. But through the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, the exiles were encouraged to keep on keeping on, and against all odds, a temple was rebuilt (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). So we should not read Haggai and Zechariah as merely droning on against the Jews and not getting very far. It was due to their inspired words that the discouraged, spiritually weak people of God were inspired to rise up and do the work of God's Kingdom, and succeed with every man's hand against them. In this is their abiding value to us. There is however the repeated theme of wasted potential- so much could have happened at that time, even the re-establishment of God's Kingdom in the form of the kingdom of Israel, replete with a Messianic ruler. But it didn't, because of short termist, self-satisficing attitudes, a failure to look beyond the immediate and personal to a far bigger picture.

*The Word of Yahweh came by Haggai the prophet-* Literally, 'by / in the hand of', a classic statement of Biblical inspiration.

*To Zerubbabel-* Haggai is addressed specifically to two men, Zerubbabel and Joshua ['Jesus'], who could have been the Messianic rulers at the time of the restoration. They both let the baton drop. It's a sad story of not using huge potential which is there in God's plan for men. He is also called Sheshbazzar in Ezra 1:8; 5:14, 16; Sheshbazzar was probably his Chaldean name; just as Daniel was called Belteshazzar.

Is. 53:2 speaks of Messiah, in a restoration context beginning in Is. 52, as 'growing up', the same word used to describe the 'coming up' from the dry ground of Babylon. This potential Messiah was Zerubbabel, but one wonders whether when he failed to fulfil the prophecies, there was the possibility that another man could have fulfilled his role. Nehemiah 'came up' from Babylon, and was "the servant" who 'prospered' Yahweh's work (Neh. 1:11; 2:20), just as the servant prophecies required (Is. 53:10; 48:15); and he was thereby the redeemer of his brethren (Neh. 5:8). He encouraged the singing of praise on the walls of Zion (Neh. 9:5; 12:46), surely in a conscious effort to fulfil the words of Is. 60:18- that Zion's gates in Messiah's Kingdom would be praise. He was "despised" as Messiah would be (Neh. 2:19; Is. 53:3 s.w.). He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, as Messiah would (Neh. 2:12 cp. Zech. 9:9); and Neh. 2:16 sounds very much like "of the people there was none with me" (Is. 63:3). The Gentiles round about came to sit at Nehemiah's table to eat and drink (Neh. 5:17), just as Isaiah had prophesied could happen on a grander scale at the restoration of the Kingdom. One wonders if the potential fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies was transferred to him? And yet Nehemiah returned to Babylon at least once, and there is no record that on his second visit he stayed on, but rather, the implication seems to be, he returned again to the service of Babylon. The total lack of Biblical information about his later life may reflect this disappointing decision. This train of thought enables us to appreciate the joy and pleasure which the Father had when finally His beloved Son lived up to all that He sought and expected.

And yet according to Jewish tradition, Nehemiah's real name was Zerubbabel, the branch (*Sanhedrin* 38a)- perhaps the same Zerubbabel as mentioned in Haggai and Zechariah. The Hippolytus Chronicle 7:3:37 even claims Nehemiah was a direct descendant of David and in the direct kingly line. His name, 'comfort of Yahweh', invites us to see him

as the potential fulfilment of the Is. 40:1,2 prophecy about a Messiah figure arising to the exiles, giving them God's comfort. At the time of Judah's redemption, while the temple had been trodden down by her enemies, the promised Messiah figure of Is. 63:1-3,18 was to come from Edom and Bozrah - both code names for Babylon. The words "Bozrah" and "Babylon" have similar root meanings ('high / fortified place'). And he was to lament how the people of Judah were not with him- "of the people there was none with me". But this is the very spirit of Nehemiah, when he returns to Jerusalem from Babylon and looks around the 'trodden down' city at night, not telling the people of the Jews about his inspection- i.e. the people were not with him (Neh. 2:11-16).

*Son of Shealtiel*- The Salathiel of Mt. 1:12; Lk. 3:27. He was directly in the Messianic line and could have therefore legitimately been the king of Judah. His father is called Pedaiah in 1 Chron. 3:17,19- presumably he was adopted by his uncle Salathiel on the death of his father.

*Governor of Judah*- Sheshbazzar / Zerubbabel was the one given the temple vessels, appointed "governor" of Judah and who laid the foundation of the temple (Ezra 5:14-16).

*And to Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying*- The Divine intention was that Zerubbabel was to be the king in the line of David, and Joshua ['Jesus'] the high priest.

Haggai 1:2 *This is what Yahweh of Armies says: These people say, 'The time hasn't yet come, the time for Yahweh's house to be built'* - The problem was that they thought it was a "time" to build their own houses (:4). They wrongly reasoned as do so many today that they must build their own stability and wealth, and then serve God's house. But His house / family comes first. Their priorities were absolutely wrong. And all attempts to build up personal wealth will be frustrated unless this is our focus. And to justify that essential position, they were perhaps arguing that the start point of the 70 years was from the destruction of the temple, rather than from the time the first captives were taken into exile. There were waves of captivities, so the start point for the 70 years was potentially open to debate. But Haggai's point to them is so relevant to this day: supposed problems of interpretation, academic issues, complaints that God's word is hard to understand, are often but a smokescreen for an underlying moral and spiritual problem. Haggai doesn't correct them about the interpretation of the 70 years prophecy- he addresses the real issue, which is that their lethargy was because of their own selfishness. Likewise we note that Haggai makes no reference to the fact that the decree to rebuild the temple had been abrogated by another decree to stop the rebuilding. Haggai never says "Just ignore that second decree, keep on building!". Rather his focus is solely upon the selfish attitude of the Jews. If they had the right attitude, Persian decree or no decree, they would be blessed and achieve the rebuilding that was potentially possible.

They reasoned that "the time" of which Jeremiah spoke hadn't come- even though the temple had miraculously been enabled to be rebuilt, for no human benefit at all to Cyrus (Isaiah 45:13 "not for price nor reward"). They felt that all the prophecies were "marvellous" in the sense of something incapable of concrete fulfilment in their experience (Zechariah 8:6). This is why they are rebuked them for saying "the time is not come...that the Lord's house should be built". They didn't want the prophecy to be fulfilled, because it would mean 'going up' from their ceiled houses- both in Babylon and in the farmsteads they had built in Judah- to build the temple.

The context of this, according to Ezra 5:1, was of the people losing heart in the rebuilding because of the opposition from the Samaritans and the temporary ban on the work from Babylon. They argued: 'We'll do God's work if we get the chance, but this ban is clearly a sign from God not to go ahead'- when really it was their self-satisfaction with their "ceiled houses" (:4) that made them give up so easily. But the Angels were eager to go ahead! The

paltry excuses for shirking the Lord's work today are no better. As ever, they stem from the apathy born of materialism, but are wrapped up in pseudo-spiritual reasoning.

The exiles asked for 'deliverance'- but they redefined 'deliverance' as meaning being allowed to live prosperously in the land of their captivity (Baruch 1:12 cp. 2:14), rather than being delivered from Babylon and returning to Judah. In a way, the book of Esther shows how God heard this prayer. But the book of Esther therefore has a sad ending, with the Jews prosperous, loved and respected, and even further away from returning to the land. Indeed, Baruch 2:21 records them misquoting Jer. 27:12 about the need to obey the King of Babylon during their captivity, and understanding this as meaning they were to remain in Babylon! Baruch 6:2 is perhaps the most serious example of misquoting and wilfully misunderstanding God's word. Here, Baruch [as Jeremiah's scribe] changes the prophecy of Jer. 29:10, that Israel were to be 70 years in Babylon and then return: "When you reach Babylon you will be there many years, a period seven generations long, after which I will bring you back". The 70 years are turned into seven generations. This was precisely the mindset spoken against in Haggai 1:2, whereby the Jews reasoned that the time had not yet come to rebuild the temple. "The time" referred to the time spoken of by Jeremiah- but Baruch had re-interpreted the 70 years as meaning seven generations. And yet all this was done with a surface-level reverence for God's word- the exiles considered themselves blessed because they had God's law (Baruch 4:4). Indeed, much of Baruch is a condemnation of idols and a demand to worship Yahweh.

Haggai 1:3 *Then the Word of Yahweh came by Haggai the prophet, saying-* We may at times wonder whether anything, even God's word, has the power to shift human complacency. But at least some responded to Haggai: "the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet" (Ezra 6:14). Haggai was addressed specifically to Zerubbabel and Joshua, the elders; and initially they did respond.

Haggai 1:4 *Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies waste?-*

The words "you... yourselves... your" are laboured. It could as well have simply been "...for you to dwell in paneled houses". But the point is laboured that it was all about "you", and God noticed this. Living in luxurious homes whilst neglecting the larger picture of God's people was exactly one of the reasons cited for the exile: "Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness... who says, I will build me a wide house and spacious rooms, and cuts him out windows; and makes a ceiling with cedar" (Jer. 22:13,14). Ezekiel records how the exiles blamed their judgment upon the sins of their fathers, but they were in fact repeating their fathers' sins. A house with panels is a house that has been built [or rebuilt] and been cosmetically finished within. Whereas God's house was still in ruins. Their argument was that the "time" was to build their own houses and then build God's house; just as many reason today. But the point is, they had finished their houses, even putting on decorative paneling; but, true to human nature, they considered they had still not finished their own houses, and therefore the time for building God's house hadn't come.

There is a clear connection with how David had a conscience that his house was grandiose than God's tabernacle (2 Sam. 7:2), and this led him to a desire to build the temple. But the returnees didn't have that conscience, or didn't respond to it.

As explained on :1, this prophecy was addressed specifically to Zerubbabel and Joshua, the elders. We can conclude that they particular were living in luxurious houses, focused upon their house rather than God's. And that is an abiding challenge to us all, especially noting that the Hebrew idea of "house" refers to a family as well as a building.

Is. 60:7 prophesied that God would “*glorify the house of my glory*”. But this was in fact a conditional prophecy, capable of fulfilment through the freewill efforts of the returning exiles. For they were empowered by Artaxerxes “to *beautify* [s.w. “glorify”] the house of the Lord” (Ezra 7:27). All their efforts to glorify / beautify the house, therefore, would have had God’s special and powerful blessing behind them. But was the house ultimately glorified? No- for Israel would not. They got sidetracked by beautifying their own homes, building “cieled houses” for themselves (Hag. 1:4 AV). The word for “cieled” or “paneled” occurs in 1 Kings 6:9; 7:3,7 to describe the roofing of the first temple- which they were to be rebuilding, rather than building their own houses. The glory would have entered the house of God’s glory as it did at the inauguration of the first temple (2 Chron. 7:1-3). Ezekiel prophesied that ultimately the glory would fill the temple as it had done then (Ez. 43:4,5). But God’s prophesy of this in Is. 60:7, that He would glorify His house, meant that He was prepared to work through men to glorify it. The fulfilment of Ezekiel’s vision of the cloud of glory entering the temple again could have been fulfilled if the exiles had done what Artaxerxes empowered them to do- to glorify the house of glory. And so the fulfilment was delayed. The glory of the temple the exiles built was tragically less than the glory of the first temple; and so it would only be in the last day of Messiah’s second coming that the house shall truly be filled with glory (Hag. 2:3,7,9). And the lesson ought to be clear for us, in the various projects and callings of our lives: it becomes crucial for us to discern God’s specific purposes for us, and insofar as we follow His leading, we will feel a blessing and power which is clearly Divine.

Haggai 1:5 *Now therefore this is what Yahweh of Armies says: Consider your ways-* “Consider your ways”, literally “set your heart on your ways”. The idea is not so much to look at their ways at the present time, but to consider the ways / paths of their past which have led them to where they are. “Consider” is a key word in Haggai (s.w. :7; 2:15,18). To ‘set our heart upon’ (Heb.) our “ways” is difficult- self-examination doesn’t come easy to any of us. Ultimately the exiles didn’t go in God’s ways, their “thoughts” and “ways” of thinking were not God’s- when they should and could have been (Is. 55:8,9; the later chapters of Isaiah are a lament that the returned exiles would not go in God’s way). The root cause for the failure was right in the heart- they were not spiritually minded, God’s passion for His Kingdom was not theirs. The spiritual intention of the exile had been that Judah would consider their “ways” (Ez. 20:43,44; 36:31). They hadn’t done this, and therefore those who returned did so from motives of personal improvement rather than spiritual desire for the things of the Kingdom- as :6 now laments.

Haggai 1:6 *You have sown much, and bring in little. You eat, but you don’t have enough. You drink, but you aren’t filled with drink. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm, and he who earns wages earns wages to put them into a bag with holes in it-*

In the context of the restoration from Babylon, Ezekiel and Zech. 8:12 prophesied: “For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things”. But we know that in reality, Judah were not obedient to the heavenly vision of Ezekiel, and therefore Judah’s agriculture was *not* blessed in this way; the vines cast their fruit, and the fruit of the ground was destroyed (Hag. 1:6,11; Mal. 3:10,11). The reason was that Zech. 8:12 was conditional- upon Zech. 8:16,17: “These are the things that ye shall do [i.e. to bring these prophecies about]; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are

things that I hate, saith the LORD". But Judah abused each other, and didn't fulfil the conditions for the prophecy.

They were gathered back [although they resisted this in that many preferred to stay in the soft life of Babylon], but they hardly dwelt safely or confidently in their land as the prophecies of the restoration had foreseen. They planted vineyards, but received a poor harvest due to their lack of attention to God's house; their enemies destroyed their fruits, and their vine "cast her fruit before the time" (Hag. 1:6; Mal. 3:10,11). Haggai and Malachi criticized Israel for this, saying it could be rectified by their obedience: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. 3:10). Yet in Nehemiah's time, Judah refused to pay tithes properly; but even then, if they had thoroughly repented, the Kingdom conditions were still possible. Such was God's desire to continue working with His hopeless people.

This frustrating lack of achievement of wealth is typical of what most secular people experience. Haggai doesn't teach that if we put God first, then we will 'get there' in our personal materialism. Rather we are to focus upon the work of God's house rather than our own. And all necessary things will be added unto us. As in Hag. 2:17, all this alludes to the curses for disobedience. They had argued that they were simply delaying obedience until what they considered the right time. But God saw through that excuse and counted it as disobedience. God saw through all their mind games, as He does today.

Haggai 1:7 *This is what Yahweh of Armies says: Consider your ways-* See on :5. "Ways" can refer to literal roads. Judah were commanded to return from Babylon in Jer. 31:21: "Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities". The same command to flee from the land of the north [Babylon] is to be found in Isaiah 48:20; Jer. 51:6; Zechariah 2:6; and they were to "get thee up to the high mountain" (Isaiah 40:9), using the same word about Judah 'going up' from Babylon to Israel. "A woman shall compass a man" (Jer. 31:22) suggests that the woman, Judah, were to take the initiative with God by mapping out the roads they would take back to Zion- the suggestion could be that the 70 year period of captivity could have been shortened had Judah taken the initiative.

Haggai 1:8 *Go up to the mountain, bring wood, and build the house-*

"The mountain" could be mount Zion now overgrown, or mount Lebanon, or the King's forest near Jerusalem of Neh. 2:8. Neh. 8:15 uses similar language concerning the Mount of Olives. The majority of Judah remained in Babylon. And the majority of those who did return, only did so in order for purely personal benefit- of having their own house and land. They 'went up' to the land, but not to Zion. With reference to Isaiah 40:9 ["get thee up to the high mountain"] Haggai exhorted them: "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. *Go up to the mountain*, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much [i.e. they expected the promised Kingdom blessings], and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house". Their focus was on their own lands and farms rather than the glory of Zion (as Nehemiah 13:10,11). They stood related to the things of God's kingdom, but never ventured beyond their own personal self-interest. They would not accept that God manifestation rather than human salvation and pleasure was the essential purpose of their God.

Haggai's prophecy can be dated quite precisely- it was given August-September 520 BC. This was harvest time. And at this very labour intensive season, where all hands had to be on deck out in the fields, the prophet called for a dedication of labour to building up God's house. Yet Judah were too concerned with their own harvests than the harvest of God's glory. They were asked to do something counter-instinctive- to take time out from harvest, and spend that time on building up God's house. And they failed the challenge. But it wasn't that they were simply lazy. Hag. 1:8, a prophecy given 18 years after the decree of Cyrus, orders the people to go up into the hills of Judah and get wood with which to build the temple. And yet according to Ezra 3:7, the decree of Cyrus 18 years earlier had resulted in cedar wood being brought from Tyre and Sidon, enough for the temple to be built. Where had the wood gone? Is the implication not that the leadership had used it for their own "cieled houses" (Hag. 1:4)? It all seems so petty minded. But this is what we are tempted to do, time and again- build up our own house and leave God's house desolate and in a very poor second place. And use what is intended for God's house on our own house. Instead of telling them to re-order more wood from Lebanon, using the king's grant to do so, Haggai tells the people to go and cut down local timber. As if time is of the essence. Perhaps this was because the Persian support for the temple building was suspended at Haggai's time. But it may be too that he was challenging them to make this effort to cut down wood and immediately rebuild the temple in order to bring about the promised blessing of immediate agricultural fecundity discussed on :9. We note Haggai's great insistence that the returnees build the temple. Yet God had never been enthusiastic for the temple, right from David's first enquiry about building it. I suggest His enthusiasm for it at this point was because He wanted them to build according to the commands of Ez. 41-48, so that His Kingdom could be re-established as envisioned there.

*I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, says Yahweh-* "That I might appear in glory", Heb. See on Hag. 2:9. The idea of God 'accepting' or taking pleasure in Israel is found in Ez. 43:27; when the temple was built and the sacrifices offered, "I will accept you". If Judah resumed building the temple according to Ezekiel's plan, "I will take pleasure" in it, God offered. They should be more committed to building the temple "that I may appear in my glory" (RSV). The glory of Yahweh as described at the end of Ezekiel could have appeared in Haggai's time- but this wonderful possibility was held back by Israel's petty minded, self-satisficing laziness. The same word is used in Ez. 43:27- *then*, when the temple of Ezekiel was built, Yahweh would "accept / take pleasure in" His people and temple. But because they built and served Him with such a mean spirit, He did not "accept" them at that time (Mal. 1:10,13 s.w.). Note how Hag. 1:8 describes the need to go up onto the mountain and build the temple- as if to recall attention to Ezekiel's opening vision of the temple as built on a mountain. But Judah would not, and therefore the Kingdom blessings of corn, new wine and oil, as well as fruitfulness on the mountains, were all withheld (Hag. 1:11).

Haggai's criticism of the returnees is more understandable if we understand that most of them were the poor, who hadn't 'made it' in Babylon. It would be fair to infer that only the poor Jews returned from Babylon. The record in Ezra 2:64-70 speaks of 42,360 people returning, along with 7,337 servants and 200 singers, making a total of 49,837. And yet only 8,100 animals went with them to transport them. This means that many would have walked. They carried 5,400 vessels for use in the temple- so the picture could be that their more wealthy brethren laded them with goods, but only the poor returned. Further, the list of towns of origin in Ezra 2 suggests it was mainly those who had originally lived in peripheral villages who returned, rather than the inhabitants of Jerusalem and larger cities.

Haggai 1:9 *You looked for much, and, behold, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away-* The people expected "much" harvest, and were disappointed at the

poor yields in Palestine. This would confirm the suggestion that many of those Jews who did return from Babylon were amongst the poor in Jewish exile society, and returned in home for personal betterment- rather than because they wished to obey the call of the prophets and establish God's glory in the land. That's a sober warning for all of us who may go through an external appearance of zeal for our God, whilst having very selfish and human motives underneath. Why, e.g., does a young woman so zealously attend church? Is it to worship God and build up His family... or because she perceives it as a potential meeting place with 'Mr. Right'? And so the examples could be multiplied.

It was when they 'brought home' their harvest wealth that God blew it away. The implication is that they should have brought their harvest not to their house but to God's house. Mal. 3:10,11 is surely relevant- that had they paid their tithes [Haggai here implies they didn't do this], then God would have blessed them.

The people were disappointed because they held the Ancient Near Eastern view that the start of temple building would bring blessings from the gods; and they "looked for" this. One of the neo-Sumerian temple hymns of Gudea of Lagash recorded on the Gudea cylinder proclaims: "When the foundations of my temple will be laid, abundance shall come. The great fields shall bring forth for thee (fruit), (the waters of) the ditches and channels shall rise out of the fissures of the ground, whence the water no longer sprang forth, water shall spring forth. In Shumer oil shall be poured forth in abundance". Yahweh was showing that such mere tokenism is not how He works. They were going to have the opposite of such blessings, because their heart attitudes were wrong.

*Why? says Yahweh of Armies, Because of My house that lies waste, while each of you is busy with his own house-* Haggai's words are full of implication that these men could have achieved so much, and yet chose not to rise up to their potentials. Hag. 1:9 takes on particular significance when read in this light: "My house lies desolate whilst you run about, each man [i.e. Zerubbabel and Joshua] to his own house". It was those two who preferred to dwell in their "cieled houses" whilst God's house lay desolate (Hag. 1:4). The reference to "cieled houses" would be only relevant to the upper classes- it would hardly be applicable to all the returned exiles. If this line of interpretation is correct, then we can understand these two men as focusing more on their own homes than on God's house, and fulfilling the great potential possible if it had been built according to Ezekiel's specifications.

"Busy" is literally to run or hasten. How true this is- men and women show far greater drive, energy and initiative in their secular lives than in the Lord's service. Haggai is basically saying that if in the drought and in their poverty they prioritize rebuilding the temple, then they will have rain and blessing. They were arguing that the time for rebuilding the temple hadn't come because they needed to get their material prosperity right first- and then they would do the Lord's work. This is a very common wrong attitude- to think that once we are set up in material prosperity, then we will do the Lord's work. Haggai argues for the very opposite. Indeed Hag. 2:15-19 seems to imply that there would be an immediate material blessing if they started rebuilding the temple, possibly in that the drought would then immediately end: "From this day on I will bless you" (Hag. 2:19). Zech. 8:12 in context seems to say the same- the drought would suddenly end and amazing harvests appear immediately: "They will sow their seed in peace and the vine will yield its fruit, and the ground will give its increase, and the skies will give their dew". Mal. 3:10,11 likewise: "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this, says Yahweh of Armies, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough for. I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast its fruit before its time in the field". Quite possibly this was the amazing fertility of land surrounding the temple spoken of in Ez. 47:12: "By the river on its banks, on this side and on

that side, shall grow every tree for food whose leaf shall not wither, neither shall its fruit fail: it shall bear new fruit every month, because its waters issue out of the sanctuary; and its fruit shall be for food, and its leaf for healing".

Haggai 1:10 *Therefore for your sake-* Perhaps specifically the selfishness of Zerubbabel and Joshua led to a drought which affected many. This is the problem with sin- it affects others, and we learn from the account of Adam and Eve.

*The skies withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit-* This is exactly the language of 1 Kings 8:35, which said that in such case, the people were to repent and pray towards the temple in Zion! But they didn't want to build that temple, they wanted rather to build up their own glory and homesteads. All things could've worked so wonderfully together for good; but they didn't want to participate in the program God had arranged, and so instead a downward spiral kicked in.

Haggai 1:11 *I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on that which the ground brings forth, on men, on livestock, and on all the labour of the hands-* These are all aspects of the promised Messianic Kingdom which could have come about at the restoration (e.g. Joel 2:19,24; Jer. 31:12). The very same sequence of words occurs in Neh. 5:11; 10:37,39; 13:5- instead of giving those things to Yahweh, the Jews stole them from each other, and jibbed about paying them as tithes to Him. And thereby they precluded the possibility of Yahweh richly blessing all His people with those very same things in a Kingdom setting. As with all those who are rejected from God's purpose, they effectively rejected themselves from His Kingdom by their behaviour, rather than Him rejecting them Himself. There's a play on words here. God's house was left "waste" (*chareb*) by them (:4,9); and therefore God sent a "drought" (*choreb*).

Haggai 1:12 *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 Yahweh, their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as Yahweh, their God, had sent him; and the people feared Yahweh-* see on Jer. 23:18,22. This was a commendable humility, for it is hard for leaders to repent. It seems that they didn't maintain this level of intensity of repentance, but all the same, God responded positively to them at that time, in response to their repentance of that moment.

Even amongst those who returned to the land, only a minority wished to take their spiritual possibilities seriously. The returned exiles are called "this people" (Hag. 1:2; 2:14) or "the people of the land" (Hag. 2:4), but only "the remnant of the people" actually responded to the call of the prophets like Haggai who encouraged them in the work and vision of what was possible.

The implication of Hag. 2:17 is that they had not totally turned to Yahweh. They had responded to Haggai's call to resume work in Hag. 1:12,13 and God had been as it were much enthused by it. But after a month's work they needed more appeal. They still hadn't turned completely and permanently to Him, with a 'repentance not to be repented of' as Paul would say. Zechariah's prophecy came two months after Haggai (Zech. 1:1). And he appeals again for the people to turn to God (Zech. 1:3). And even after Zechariah's time, the people still didn't really return to Yahweh in repentance, despite their focus on legalism and xenophobic hatred of Gentiles: "Return to Me, and I will return to you, says Yahweh of Armies. But you say, 'How shall we return?'" (Mal. 3:7). Clearly their turning to Him had been only temporary. But still God was enthusiastic over their even very temporal response. Despite surely foreknowing how they would very quickly flag. He so wanted the Kingdom to be restored and His people to live in all joy and peace of relationship with Him. And that desire

is unabated to this day, despite having been frustrated by His people so often, so deeply and for so long.

Haggai 1:13 *Then Haggai, Yahweh's messenger-* An example of *malak* referring not only to supernatural beings ["Angels"] but to men; references to 'sinning Angels' must be understood as referring therefore to men and not heavenly beings. Haggai is presented as the mediator, taking the message of repentance to God, and Him sending Haggai back to the people with a message. The Messiah figure was to be accompanied by a messenger, "the messenger of the covenant" (Mal. 3:1); and Haggai could have been that to Zerubbabel, whilst he was willing to live up to the call to be the Messianic figure of that time. But he failed, and so the prophecies of the restoration with their Messianic figure and his messenger were reapplied to the Lord Jesus, who was heralded by John the Baptist as the "messenger".

*Spoke Yahweh's message to the people, saying, I am with you, says Yahweh-* The allusion is to the repeated promises that "I will be with you" in leaving Egypt and going in to possess the promised land and establish God's Kingdom there (Num. 14:43). This is what could have happened had the exiles left Babylon and returned to the land wishing to fulfil the restoration prophecies. Yahweh was "with" them despite the fact He also saw them as unclean (Hag. 2:14). His Spirit remained amongst them (Hag. 2:5) despite this. His being "with" them, His presence, is thus parallel with the abiding of His Spirit with them. This is the same language used of the Comforter in Jn. 14-16. The Spirit / presence / God's being "with" us is abiding, despite our failures and periods of uncleanness, but we must respond to it. Here in Haggai we have a profound window onto how God sees His people.

Haggai 1:14 *Yahweh 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-* The returnees had laid foundations for a temple far smaller than that commanded in Ez. 40-48. But still God was eager to work with them, and part of Haggai's message is to encourage them to believe this. The temple system of Ez. 40-48 carefully avoids any mention of a high priest; it speaks only of a "Prince". Haggai addresses Zerubbabel the prince [who was a descendant of king Jehoiachin, 1 Chron. 3:17-19] and Joshua the high priest; and in 1:14 God stirs up Joshua's spirit to go ahead with the restoration. This could be read as another concession to a less than ideal restoration- God was willing to work with a human high priesthood, although the new covenant didn't require that. But Joshua was clothed in filthy garments (Zech. 3:3), was rebuked, forgiven ["I have caused your iniquity to pass from you", Zech. 3:4] and encouraged to have another go at being a pure High Priest. And still he failed. God was trying again and again to try to force through the restoration of the Kingdom.

God stirs us up, but Timothy was told to stir up the gift of the Spirit within him (2 Tim. 1:6). There has to be some human response or else man becomes a mere puppet. In response to their desire to respond to the call for repentance, God stirred up their spirit / mind. He can work directly on the human heart, giving us attitudes and ideas; and He does so especially in response to our desire for this. Here we have a classic Old Testament example of the work of God's Spirit on human hearts, which becomes such a characteristic of New Testament Christianity. The same word is used of how He stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to allow the exiles to return (Ezra 1:1), and also the spirits of the exiles who decided to return (Ezra 1:5). Although their motives were on one hand not right, God also worked on their hearts. Human motivation is complex, but God worked there, confirming them as needed. It seems that the stirring up of spirit occurred when they left Babylon, and now again once they had flagged. It is similar to the New Testament idea of being filled up with the Spirit, as if there are moments of filling and refilling. And this stands true to our spiritual experience.

*And the spirit of all the remainder of the people; and they came and worked on the house of Yahweh of Armies, their God-*

"Came and worked" suggests they had shirked the work of rebuilding God's house and Jerusalem in order to go to reclaim and resettle their ancestral land. As noted on :12, only a remnant of the people left Babylon and of them, only a remnant repented.

Even with Ezekiel's prophecies behind him concerning "the prince", Zerubbabel was easily discouraged in the rebuilding, and needed the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah to encourage him again. He kept the feast of tabernacles (Ezra 3:4) but without dwelling in booths (Neh. 8:17)- i.e., half heartedly. He *could* have been Messiah, perhaps- he may well have been age 30/33 at the time of the restoration (Mt. 1:12,13). When Judah returned, they could have entered into the new covenant, featuring "nobles [an intensive plural, meaning 'the great noble']... and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them" (Jer. 30:21). Zerubbabel the Governor could have fulfilled this; but he flunked out. Yet God lifted up his spirit a second time (Hag. 1:14 cp. Ezra 1:5); he was given a second chance, such was God's enthusiasm that he should achieve what was potentially possible for him. But again, he failed. He saw the glory of Babylon as more attractive than the hard work required to bring about Yahweh's eternal glory in Zion. It is noteworthy how God worked through this man's failures, and desired to give him (and all Israel) further opportunities. See on Zech. 5:11; 11:17 for evidence of Zerubbabel's return to Babylon.

Haggai 1:15 *In the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king-* The peoples' response to God's word only lasted a limited time. For over the next three months, Haggai will give further messages to encourage them. Although their initial response was confirmed by the Spirit stirring them, it only lasted a limited period. Just as our seeing sense about our materialism, or other spiritual indolence, only lasts a short time before needing to be reaffirmed by us. For repentance and commitment are decisions which by their nature need to be lived out in an ongoing sense and not just at one moment in time. It took 23 days for the whole process of appealing for repentance, repentance and then Divine stirring up of the minds of Zerubbabel. This seems to connect with how an Angel caused the 21 day - year delay in the rebuilding (Dan. 10:12,13; Zech. 3:1 etc. ); that was maybe representing the apathy of the Jews as well as the opposition of the Samaritans in the court of Heaven. The two Angel chariots sent to overcome this opposition (see notes on Zech. 6) would therefore have tried to influence the Jews to be more genuinely committed to Zion's cause. Part of their work was in the inspiring of Haggai's words (note the many references to "the Lord of Hosts" in Haggai). Again, the context of Ezra 5:1 must be remembered- Haggai prophesied to encourage the people during the 21 year cessation of the rebuilding (details in Ezra 4).

## HAGGAI CHAPTER 2

### Haggai Chapter 2

Haggai 2:1 *In the seventh month, in the twenty-first day of the month, the word of Yahweh came by Haggai the prophet, saying-* As noted on Hag. 1:14,15, this allowed about a month for the Spirit of God to stir up the spirit of Zerubbabel and Joshua in response to their repentance. But despite that work of the Spirit on their hearts, they still needed to be called to respond to it (:4). This date was the seventh day of the feast of tabernacles, exactly when the first temple was dedicated (2 Chron. 8:8-10), around when the altar was dedicated (Ezra 3:1-7). This was the time to celebrate harvest- but the harvest had been pathetic and they were facing starvation. And Haggai will go on to point out that the new temple was nothing compared to Solomon's temple (:3). But

his message was that despite the failure to build according to the commands of Ez. 40-48, and not even according to the pattern of Solomon's temple... God was still prepared to carry on working with His people, to bring about His restored Kingdom on earth. He would shake heaven and earth and make that house glorious worldwide (:6,7). The essence of that Spirit is to be seen in His work with men today.

Haggai 2:2 *Speak now to Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remainder of the people, saying-* As noted on Hag. 1:14, only a remnant ["remainder"] returned from Babylon, and out of them, it seems only a remnant were responsive to the Spirit once they returned to Judah. But from this minority of a minority, God was prepared to work- even though there had not been the wholesale repentance and return which He envisaged, still He was eager to work with a handful of people. And yet tragically even they appear to have not responded in the long term to God's possibilities which He had set up for them. This is encouragement to keep on and on working with people, adjusting to whatever their dysfunction throws back at us, ever seeking the extension of the principles of God's Kingdom and His glory through whatever we have left to work with.

Haggai 2:3 *'Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Isn't it in your eyes as nothing?'*- The allusion is to how some wept and some rejoiced when the restored temple was completed (Ezra 5:13). Those who wept did so because it was nothing like the original temple, let alone that commanded by Ezekiel. There is the hint in Hag. 2:3-9 that despite the planned temple being smaller than that commanded by Ezekiel, causing some to weep when the foundations were laid rather than rejoice (Ezra 3:12), God was still willing to force through His intention of restoring the Kingdom: "'Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Isn't it in your eyes as nothing? Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel!' says Yahweh. 'Be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest! Be strong, all you people of the land', says Yahweh, 'and work, for I am with you', says Yahweh of Armies... 'Don't be afraid'... 'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former', says Yahweh". Likewise Zech. 4:10 appealing for the faithful not to despise the day of small things.

As the walls rose from the foundations laid, the contrast with the earlier temple and that commanded by Ezekiel would have become increasingly obvious. Some very old exiles would have remembered the temple from 70 years ago in their childhood, before the deportation. But the chronologies vary; Daniel 9,10 would suggest that the 70 year period was extended, hence Daniel's concern that the period had ended but still there was no restoration. So Haggai may mean 'Who is left who saw the previous temple? Nobody. And how do your eyes see it? As nothing, compared to the importance of your own houses?'

Is. 60:7 had prophesied that God would "*glorify the house of my glory*". But this was in fact a conditional prophecy, capable of fulfilment through the freewill efforts of the returning exiles, if *they* wished to glorify that house. For they were empowered by Artaxerxes "to *beautify* [s.w. "glorify"] the house of the Lord" (Ezra 7:27). All their efforts to glorify / beautify the house, therefore, would have had God's special and powerful blessing behind them. But was the house ultimately glorified? No- for Israel would not. They got sidetracked by beautifying their own homes, building "cieled / paneled houses" for themselves (Hag. 1:4). The word for "cieled" occurs in 1 Kings 6:9; 7:3,7 to describe the roofing of the first temple- which they were to be

rebuilding, rather than building their own houses. The glory would have entered the house of God's glory as it did at the inauguration of the first temple (2 Chron. 7:1-3). Ezekiel prophesied that ultimately the glory would fill the temple as it had done then (Ez. 43:4,5). But God's prophesy of this in Is. 60:7, that He would glorify His house, meant that He was prepared to work through men to glorify it. The fulfilment of Ezekiel's vision of the cloud of glory entering the temple again could have been fulfilled if the exiles had done what Artaxerxes empowered them to do- to glorify the house of glory. And so the fulfilment was delayed. The glory of the temple the exiles built was tragically less than the glory of the first temple; and so it would only be in the last day of Messiah's second coming that the house shall truly be filled with glory (Hag. 2:3,7,9), and even that may require a reapplication and reinterpretation of the concept of God's house. And the lesson ought to be clear for us, in the various projects and callings of our lives: it becomes crucial for us to discern God's specific purposes for us, and insofar as we follow His leading, we will feel a blessing and power which is clearly Divine.

Haggai 2:4 *Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel!* says Yahweh. *'Be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest! Be strong, all you people of the land', says Yahweh, 'and work-* "Work" is the same word as used in Hag. 1:14 to describe how a month or so earlier, the people had begun again to "work". But now they were flagging and needed further encouragement to go and "work". We noted on :1 that a month had passed since the Spirit of God began working on their hearts. But they still needed to be stirred up to actually use that potential power- to be "be strong... and work". The Corinthians likewise were given the Spirit, as 1 Cor. 1 makes clear, but they were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1) and needed exhortation to live according to the spiritual potential given them. And we are all in this position.

"Be strong... and work" [Heb. 'do'] is a phrase designed to recall previous usages in the context of returning to the promised land and building the temple. David often used it in encouraging Solomon to establish the Kingdom and build the temple (1 Chron. 28:10,20); it was the prophetic word to king Asa, encouraging him to re-establish temple worship and a spiritual revival (2 Chron. 15:7), and to Joshua in encouraging him to re-enter the land and overcome all opposition from the local tribes there (Josh. 1:7; 23:6); and particularly of being strong and working in rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple (Ezra 6:22; Neh. 2:18; 6:9). They were to accept that God was willing and eager to strengthen their hands in the work; but they had to make use of it.

*For I am with you', says Yahweh of Armies-* The repeated title "Yahweh of Armies" would have been understood as a reference to Yahweh as captain of armies of Angels. God makes His Angels spirits; they were a vehicle for the work of the Spirit at that time, as the book of Daniel demonstrates. All that Angelic working was behind every effort Judah would make to rebuild the temple. But they didn't use it. "I am with you *to save you* from Babylon" (Jer. 42:11) focuses God's presence upon His salvation- Jesus. The prophetic potential became reapplied and rescheduled to us, in that the ultimate term of "I am with you" is in the Lord Jesus and the gift of the Spirit to enable us to extend and establish the work of the Kingdom (Jn. 7:33; 13:33).

Haggai 2:5 *This is the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, and My Spirit dwelt among you. 'Don't be afraid'-*

The idea seems to be "The word which I covenanted with you, as well as My spirit, remains amongst you". God was still seeking to propel forwards His Kingdom

purpose, despite the weak commitment of His people. Just as He did at the Red Sea, and just as He does to this day with those He took out of the world through baptism. There is a similar idea in a restoration context in Is. 59:21: "As for me, this is My covenant with them, says the Lord; My spirit that is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, will not depart out of your mouth". God's spoken word of covenant was to save His people, and His Spirit would continually work to bring this about. The restoration was to be by the work of the Spirit, not by human might, as also stressed in Zech. 4:6 "Not by might but by My Spirit". And we see that work in stirring the hearts of the exiles to leave Babylon, and now again years later stirring up their hearts to respond further. The idea seems to be that "My Spirit abides" with the people, despite their being so weak and temperamental in their spiritual enthusiasm (see especially on :17). This is the language of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, abiding with us. The Corinthians likewise had the Spirit, it abode with them, but they didn't use it, they weren't open to its influence, and they were "not spiritual". For those who have become God's people, the help of the Spirit is always available, although they have to choose to make use of it.

"My Spirit (Angel- Ps. 104:4) remaineth among you" (AV), just as the same Angel was with them "when ye came out of Egypt". And with us too. God encourages those rebuilding Jerusalem to have faith because the Angel is still among them: "Yet now be strong. . . and work: for I (the Angel) am with you, saith the Lord of Hosts (Angels): according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt (the Angel made that covenant) so My Spirit (Angel) remaineth among you; fear ye not". Similarly Nehemiah recounts the past activities of God's Angel (Neh. 9:19-24) as a stimulus to faith in God bringing them through immediate problems. See on Gen. 24:40,56.

But as mentioned on :4, the Spirit was not simply an Angel; it was articulated through the work of God's Spirit on the human spirit or mind. The word of covenant when they came out of Egypt was the entire old covenant; the phrase is thus used at the time of the exodus (Ex. 24:8; 34:27; Dt. 29:1). But throughout Deuteronomy, the second statement of the covenant, there was the repeated encouragement: "Fear not" (Dt. 1:21; 3:2; 20:3 etc.). The context is always of not fearing the local tribes of Canaan, and of being assured that it was simply God's good pleasure to give them the Kingdom. That essential desire of God was true in Haggai's time as it had been in Moses', and it abides true for us. As He sent the Angel before them and amongst them, so His Spirit was and is active in the hearts and circumstances of all who wish to be in His Kingdom and do the work of that Kingdom.

Haggai 2:6 *For this is what Yahweh of Armies says: 'Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the dry land-* In a "short time", God would yet once more (GNB) shakes the heavens and earth as He had done at Sinai when Israel had previously entered the land and taken the Kingdom (s.w. Ps. 68:8). The potential was that soon after Haggai's words [in "a little while"] there would be direct Divine intervention involving earthquakes and the shaking of all nations (:7) to support the re-establishment of God's Kingdom in Israel under the Messianic rulership of Zerubbabel. This is also foreseen in Zech. 14, where the earthquake is seen as creating a new plateau upon which a new temple could be built. This plateau was also seen in the opening of the Ez. 40-48 vision of the commandments as to how to build the new temple complex. This could be brought about by the shaking / earthquake which could have come at the end of the Ez. 38 invasion: "in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel... all the men who are on the surface of the earth,

shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall and every wall shall fall to the ground" (Ez. 38:19,20). Had Judah accepted the new covenant offered to them in Ez. 33,34, they would have revived as in Ez. 37, the Ez. 38 invasion and earthquake would have happened and then on the resultant plateau, the new temple would have been built. Despite Judah's failures to engage with these things, Haggai and Zechariah were saying that if the people wanted, they could have the earthquake and temple. God really was trying to force through His saving purpose.

But it didn't happen then. Judah didn't repent, and Zerubbabel beat it back to Babylon. These words have therefore been reapplied and rescheduled, to the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross and to the final literal establishment of the Kingdom at His second coming; in this context they are quoted in Heb. 12:26-28.

*Haggai 2:7 And I will shake all nations-* This is the equivalent of Daniel's image of the nations being ground to powder and replaced by the mountain of God's Kingdom which cannot be shaken (:22; Dan. 2:44; Heb. 12:27). Then the prophecy of Ez. 38:20 could have come true, that all the nations within the *eretz* would "shake" (s.w.). These prophecies could have come true then, but they were rescheduled. The nations in the land and also the Medo Persian empire would be shaken to destruction soon, and so the exiles should not fear them and resume the rebuilding of the city and temple. This is powerful encouragement to us, who are to live as if we are on the eve of the Lord's return. But the Hebrew here is "I am shaking", whereas the shaking of :6 is in a future tense. The idea is that God was already working among the nations to bring about the re-establishment of His Kingdom which was then potentially possible.

*The precious things of all nations will come-* This could mean that they would all donate their wealth to the new system of worship in Jerusalem. Or the phrase could be translated "the desire of all nations", referring to Messiah. We note that the same word is used of Saul, the anointed ['messiah'] king of Israel (1 Sam. 9:20). This prediction would then be directly relevant to Zerubbabel, the intended Messianic ruler. We could translate: "The desired one of all the nations will come", a clear reference to a Messiah figure 'coming' who would be associated with the "house" being filled with glory. This is exactly the picture in Ez. 40-48.

This message was given by Haggai at the time that temple building had been stopped by the Persian authorities for fear that they would lose tax revenue, and that the Jews would seek to create an independent state. And now Haggai prophesies exactly those things. Hag. 2:8 is absolutely specific that all wealth belongs to Yahweh, God of the Jews: "The silver is mine and the gold is mine"- not Persia's. This points up the miracle worked by God in the heart of Darius to restore the original decree of Cyrus, allowing the Jew to go ahead rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. They had been encouraged by Haggai and Zechariah, who both had predicted that Zerubbabel would become an independent king of Judah (Hag. 2:23; Zech. 6:12,13), and indeed before him, the great mountain would fall. Surely that would have been understood as the Persian empire: "Who are you, great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you are a plain; and he will bring out the capstone with shouts of 'Grace, grace, to it!'" (Zech. 4:7). These prophecies were exactly what the adversaries of Judah were informing the Persians about. And yet against all secular sense, the Persians commanded the rebuilding work to go on. Because of the power of God's Spirit on human hearts.

*And I will fill this house with glory, says Yahweh of Armies-* Just as Solomon's temple was filled with glory (1 Kings 8:10,11; 2 Chron. 5:13,14; 7:1,2). Haggai sought to inspire the people when they had flagged in their zeal for the Lord's house; and the method he chose was to remind them that they *could* bring about Messiah's Kingdom if they wholeheartedly worked with God to allow His ideal intentions to come to pass. Note the stress on *this* house- but that temple they built wasn't filled with glory, the vision of Ezekiel about the glory returning and entering the temple wasn't fulfilled- and Solomon's former temple was more glorious than that of the second temple. Why? Because they didn't get on and build it and glorify it as they were intended to. Although they had built the new temple on wrong or suboptimal foundations, smaller than the former temple and not according to the commands of Ez. 40-48, God would still work through it and enter it in glory. This is huge encouragement to those who lament they set their life up on poor foundations, through marriage to an unbeliever, entry into a career or financial obligations that strap us for life... although as the walls rise up from those foundations we realize how far we are from how we should have built. But the huge encouragement is that God still wants to drive forward His purpose by abiding within us.

If "the desire of all nations" does refer to Messiah coming with an earthquake and glory filling the temple, then this is a prophecy of what *could* have happened at that time, but it has been deferred to the second coming of the Lord Jesus. This is exactly the picture we have in Ezekiel 43, of a Messiah figure entering the temple in glory. But in Haggai's context, he is encouraging the Jews of his time that this is what really and truly could have happened then and there, had they been obedient. The cherubim visions of Ez. 1,9 and 10 are applied in the New Testament to the glorified Christ (Rev. 2:18; 1 Pet. 4:17; 2 Pet. 2:4-9). This surely implies that they were ultimately fulfilled in the Messiah; and perhaps we are to understand that they could have had fulfilment in a Messiah figure at the time of the restoration.

It was God's plan that the light of His glory would enter into Zion at the restoration; but Israel had to act as if they believed this, and likewise show forth glory: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee" (Isaiah 60:1). He eagerly prophesied that "strangers shall build up thy walls... in my favour have I had mercy upon thee" (Isaiah 60:10)- not 'I am prepared to have mercy upon you', nor 'I will have mercy...'. God had had mercy upon them, and invited them to respond to it.

Perhaps Nehemiah was some kind of potential Messiah- for the surrounding Gentiles 'came up' to him and shared in the luxurious temple meals (a common Kingdom prophecy- the same Hebrew words are used for the Gentiles 'coming up' to the temple in Is. 60:5,11; Jer. 16:19; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:22). Those meals could have been the Messianic banquets. See on Mal. 1:10.

Haggai 2:8 *The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine', says Yahweh of Armies-* This may be in answer to the feeling of the exiles that 'We can't afford to do this work on God's house. We need to sort out our own houses first' (Hag. 1:4). Such reasoning is often encountered amongst believers. God's response is that all the silver and gold on the planet is His. He would provide. And indeed He had done, through the generous provision of Cyrus for all the material needs connected with the rebuilding project. The reference could also be to the "precious things" of :7 which the nations will bring; they are already His, and to give wealth to Him is only to accept that we do not own

it. For we 'give' to Him what is already His. "*The silver and the gold*" could refer to all the silver and gold [wealth] that there is. This would imply an urgency to the rebuilding- if all the wealth of the surrounding world was to enter the temple as a store house for it, then the temple must be rebuilt to store it. By being slack to rebuild the temple (Hag. 1:4) and not doing so according to the specifications in Ez. 40-48, the Divine purpose with it could not therefore come about. Petty human short sightedness therefore precluded the fulfilment of so much Divine potential.

Haggai 2:9 *'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former', says Yahweh of Armies-*

Glory is a theme of Haggai (cp. Hag. 1:8 "that I might appear in glory", Heb.). This is his way of saying that the glory prophesied to enter Ezekiel's temple (Ez. 43:1-5) could indeed enter Zerubbabel's temple; despite the disobedience of the builders to so many details. This entry of glory into the temple is found in Isaiah's restoration prophecies: "I will add glory to My glorious house... I will make the place of My feet glorious" (Is. 60:7,13).

As noted on Hag. 1:8, God would have appeared in glory at the restoration of the temple. The glory of God and His presence was to appear in the temple; but if the Jews wouldn't rebuild the temple, then it wouldn't. In common with Ezekiel, Zechariah and Isaiah, Haggai speaks here of the possible glory that could have been at the restoration, but which has now been postponed until the second coming. Compare this with what actually happened- the old men wept because the new rebuilt temple was nothing like the former temple; see on :3. The glory of the restored temple was prophesied as being far greater than that of the former; Is. 60:17 alluded to this in prophesying that "For brass [in Solomon's temple] I will bring gold, and for iron [that was in Solomon's fixtures] I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron". But it simply didn't happen, because God's people were satisfied with a small, inglorious temple so that they could get on with building their own "cieled houses" (Hag. 1:4; the same word is used in describing how the temple of Solomon was "covered", or cieled, with cedar).

*'And in this place will I give peace', says Yahweh of Armies-* Peace with God, forgiveness through grace. When the foundation stone of the temple was laid, there should have been excited acclamation: "Grace, grace unto it" (Zech. 4:7). But instead the old men wept when the foundation was laid, knowing that the temple was nothing compared to what it ought to be (Ezra 3:12). This would have been possible in Haggai's time, had they built the temple according to the specifications in Ez. 40-48. But it was reapplied and rescheduled to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus, and His second coming. God's promise of peace "in this place" couldn't come about if Judah would not rebuilt the "place". This is the urgency of the appeal. The gift of peace clearly alludes to the blessings for obedience to the old covenant, which Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah taught had been permanently broken: "I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will remove evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land". The blessings for obedience would be given without their specific obedience- this was the wonder of the new covenant's offer, which they tragically turned down, instead seeking to half heartedly obey the old covenant through keeping parts of the law of Moses. This attempted obedience to the now broken old covenant is stressed several times in Ezra. The promise of peace and glory in the temple never came true. But the essence did, in that in that place, Jerusalem, the Lord was to die and "made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20). Note that God's "glory" consists in this "peace".

Haggai 2:10 *In the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the Word of Yahweh came by Haggai the prophet, saying-* The wonderful potentials mentioned in the preceding verses were precluded by Judah's unspirituality, and Haggai now addresses that. In the two months since that prophecy (:1), there had been little progress. The 24th day of the 9th month was when the foundation of the temple was laid (:18), exactly three months after the building work on the temple resumed. Whilst the foundation had been dug and laid out in Ezra 5:16, the symbolic laying of the foundation stone [with some kind of ceremony] was not done until later; or perhaps this was a rededication ceremony as the work revived. The following arguments are therefore in relation to the temple. Purity was not spread by physical contact e.g. with a temple; and impurity spread easily. The returnees were impure already, and could not be made any further unclean through the 'guilt by association' which they feared by fellowshiping with Gentiles or the Jews already living in Judah.

Haggai 2:11 *Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying-* Haggai is addressed to Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest. Perhaps they were being asked to ask this question. The answer of the priests is given in :12 and :13 so we assume this was literally asked and answered. But in :12 Haggai asks the question, so perhaps this is addressed to Haggai. It is a common Divine method to ask a question in order to elicit a conclusion within the conscience of the questioned person.

The point of this section in 2:11-14 is really an appeal for purity, and an understanding that purity cannot be obtained by mere contact with the pure. It is a matter of the heart. The need for the returnees to be cleansed is major. But it was exactly their lack of repentance and cleansing which precluded the restoration prophecies from fulfilment at that time. Ez. 43:9 implies that had they cleansed themselves at this time, Yahweh would have literally dwelt for ever in Zion: "Let them put their apostasy and the corpses of their kings far from Me, and I will dwell among them forever". We note that the question in Hag. 2:13 was specifically about defilement from a corpse, so it is alluding to Ez. 43:9. They were still unclean and thus precluding the fulfilment of Ez. 40-48.

Haggai 2:12 *'If someone carries holy food in the fold of his garment, and the garment touches bread, stew, wine, oil, or any food, will it too become holy?'. The priests answered, No-* The questions of :12 and :13 lead up to the bald statement in :14 that the Jews are "unclean" and their work for God unacceptable. This hard statement is in juxtaposition to all the wonderful Messianic and Kingdom prophecies of the preceding verses, uttered just weeks previously. The questions of :12 and :13 add up to this: Uncleanness can be passed on easily, whereas holiness is not passed on. Just a scrap of sanctified food caught up accidentally in the fold of a robe doesn't make that garment holy, and if that garment then touches the things offered in sacrifice to God, they are not thereby made holy. This was the essence of the argument being used by the Jews. They considered their unclean offerings were made clean through the most contorted and unrealistic path of reasoning. They thought they could be acceptable to God because of some legalistic, theoretical 'acceptability by association', even though the Mosaic law didn't support such reasoning. The mentality is seen today, in those nominal believers who imagine that their external association with some organized

religion or denomination somehow guarantees their acceptability with God. The argument serves as a caveat against the mentality that holiness is spread physically- and there clearly were some who imagined that a rebuilt temple would somehow make the people holy.

Haggai 2:13 *Then Haggai said, If one who is unclean by reason of a dead body touch any of these, will it be unclean? The priests answered, It will be unclean-* As explained on :12, the Jews were thinking that they were acceptable to God by some quasi spiritual, pseudo logical path of reasoning whereby a fragment of holy bread could pass on to them personal acceptability before God. But the reality was that this wasn't support by God's principles in the law. What the law emphasized instead was that uncleanness spreads. And they were unclean (:14).

Judah in the new temple would not "defile" Yahweh's Name any more (Ez. 43:7,8) e.g. by touching dead bodies (Ez. 44:25); but they were lazy to keep the uncleanness laws, they *did* defile Yahweh by touching dead bodies and then offering the sacrifices (Hag. 2:13,14 s.w.), just as Israel previously had been defiled by touching the dead bodies of their kings and then offering sacrifices (Ez. 43:7); but now, Judah thought they were above God's law, and therefore did exactly the same things which had caused the temple to be destroyed in the first place. The promise that Yahweh would dwell in the new temple was conditional on them not touching dead bodies (Ez. 43:9); but Hag. 2:13 makes it apparent that they did this very thing at the time of the restoration.

LXX adds "they shall be pained because of their toils; and ye have hated him that reproved in the gates".

Haggai 2:14 *Then Haggai answered, 'So is this people, and so is this nation before Me', says Yahweh; 'and so is every work of their hands. That which they offer there is unclean-* The specific work of their hands was surely their partial rebuilding of the temple and offer sacrifice there, but not according to the specifications in Ez. 40-48. Their work was so compromised by their wrong attitudes that what they built was therefore unclean. The reference may also be to the animals and crops raised by 'the work of their hands' (:17) which they then offered as sacrifices; but this was rejected by God as unclean. The people who had returned from exile were obsessed with separation from the Samaritans and also from their own brethren who had remained in the land. Haggai is warning them that the returnees themselves were unclean because of their attitudes, so all attempts to remain pure from the supposedly impure were irrelevant. "This people" may refer to the returnees and "this nation" to all the Jews including those already living in the land when the returnees arrived. They were all alike unclean, so the returnees were wrong to treat the other Jews as unclean and to argue that they had to avoid contamination from them. They were already unclean themselves by their attitudes. And this is a big argument against 'guilt by association' in all its forms.

"What they offer there" refers to the altar they had rebuilt in Ezra 3. They wrongly thought that that altar would somehow make them clean. But because their attitudes were wrong, it actually made all sacrificed upon it unclean. Or the idea may be that because they were unclean, they had made the altar unclean and therefore so were their sacrifices offered upon it. Zechariah prophesies soon afterwards of how even this problem of uncleanness could be resolved. The vision of Zech. 5 speaks of the banishment of sin and sinners from Judah and back to Babylonia.

Haggai 2:15 *Now, please consider from this day and backward, before a stone was laid on a stone in Yahweh's temple-* Every day counted. Haggai asked them to look back through the few months during which he had given his prophecies about the great possibilities for re-establishing the Kingdom with God's abundant blessing. Even during those days, they had been guilty of not responding, and so the drought had not been lifted.

Haggai 2:16 *Through all that time, when one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty, there were only twenty-* Blessings of good harvests, corn and wine, were all part of the blessings promised for obedience to the covenant. But throughout the days Haggai had been appealing to them, their last harvest had been eaten away by disease and plague ("blight, mildew, and hail", :17). These words may be addressed specifically to Zerubbabel and Joshua (see on hag. 1:1). They had lost their harvests, because of refusing to respond to the call of Haggai.

This verse gives very precise commentary on the state of the harvests in Judah after the return- grain stores were 50% below the norm, and the amount of wine produced was 60% less than *expected*. Surely these figures were well known to the people- for they had presumably worked them out, and Haggai is quoting their figures back to them. Notice how the people had worked out the yield of wine which they *expected*. The implication would seem to be that they returned to Judah expecting material prosperity, good harvests and personal wealth; hence their bitter disappointment when they didn't get it. This, then, would appear to have been their motivation for the return- rather than obedience to the words of the prophets or a desire to see God's Kingdom established in His land.

Haggai 2:17 *I struck you with blight, mildew, and hail in all the work of your hands; yet you didn't turn to Me', says Yahweh-* This striking of the harvest had been over the two months or so since Haggai had prophesied and encouraged them to live up to their potential; see on :16. They had returned to the land, but not to God. They were still impenitent, blaming their situation on the sins of the fathers and of the Gentiles around them. The afflictions mentioned were the very punishments mentioned for committing unfaithfulness to the covenant, and which would climax in being removed from the land (Dt. 28:22; 1 Kings 8:37). They had returned to the land, but were doing the very things which had led to them being expelled from the land, and experiencing the same judgments which they had in the lead up to the exile (Am. 4:9).

"I smote you with blasting and with mildew" alludes to the curses for disobedience in Dt. 28:22 and Am. 4:9. They had argued that they were simply delaying obedience until what they considered the right time. But God saw through that excuse and counted it as disobedience. They are rebuked for not turning i.e. repenting, a tacit acceptance that their consciences had been touched by the disparity between their houses and God's house. But they had subdued those prods of conscience beneath the reasoning that they would be obedient, but at a later time. Here we see how God analyses the human mind and sees right through all our mind games.

The tragedy of "You didn't turn to Me" in Hag. 2:17 is that God has repeatedly tried to comfort the returned exiles that "I am with you" (Hag. 2:4; 1:13)... "My Spirit

dwelt [and dwells] among you" (Hag. 2:5). But they didn't want to be with Him, to realize the presence of His Spirit amongst them, just as the Corinthians were not spiritual although they had been richly given the Spirit. The returnees were preoccupied by the immediate, and their desire to live their petty dreams. And so it is oftentimes with man. Haggai's call echoes to us- not to be preoccupied with life and material things. The final restoration prophet concluded with the promise that God would have to send the Elijah prophet to turn their hearts to God: "He will turn the hearts..." (Mal. 4:6). Despite the religious system developed by the returnees and their exclusion of others, they didn't obey Haggai's call to turn their hearts to their God. And so through the Elijah prophet it was God's plan to almost forcibly turn their hearts to Him. But even the fulfilment in John the Baptist and the appearance of God's Son only achieved this in a minority. The problem was [and still is] preoccupation with man's immediate agendas, be they religious or secular.

The implication of Hag. 2:17 is that they had not totally turned to Yahweh. They had responded to Haggai's call to resume work in Hag. 1:12,13 and God had been as it were much enthused by it. But after a month's work they needed more appeal. They still hadn't turned completely and permanently to Him, with a 'repentance not to be repented of' as Paul would say. Zechariah's prophecy came two months after Haggai (Zech. 1:1). And he appeals again for the people to turn to God (Zech. 1:3). And even after Zechariah's time, the people still didn't really return to Yahweh in repentance, despite their focus on legalism and xenophobic hatred of Gentiles: "Return to Me, and I will return to you, says Yahweh of Armies. But you say, 'How shall we return?'" (Mal. 3:7). Clearly their turning to Him had been only temporary. But still God was enthusiastic over their even very temporal response. Despite surely foreknowing how they would very quickly flag. He so wanted the Kingdom to be restored and His people to live in all joy and peace of relationship with Him. And that desire is unabated to this day, despite having been frustrated by His people so often, so deeply and for so long.

Haggai 2:18 *'Consider, please, from this day and backward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, since the day that the foundation of Yahweh's temple was laid, consider it-* See on :10 for discussion of how this was a later laying of the foundation stone after the initial foundations had been laid. They were being asked as in :15 to think back over the days since the rebuilding program began. Although they had apparently worked to rebuild the temple, day after day had been of drought and pestilence. Their work for God had been "unclean" (:14) because their motives were impure, as noted on Hag. 1:4. But there is a purposeful ambiguity with the word translated "backward"; it can also mean "upward" or effectively 'forward'. In this case, as suggested on :19, Haggai was urging them to repent that very day, and see the changes that would happen in the weather and the fertility of their land. "Consider..." was therefore an appeal for repentance. This appeal was repeated in the eighth month (Zech. 1:1,4,6); and there was apparent response to that appeal (Zech. 1:6). But now in the ninth month, it was apparent that the repentance was only nominal.

Haggai 2:19 *Is the seed still in the barn? Yes, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree haven't brought forth. From this day on I will bless you'-* The original could imply that God had promised blessing upon them, from the first day the rebuilding program started (:18). But it hadn't come. Their harvests were so small that it was as if they had never even sown anything, and the seed was still in the barn; and the fruit trees had not born anything. We see here how God can promise things which

are conditional even if the conditions aren't highlighted; and so the promised blessing will not come about automatically. Or the original could equally suggest that although indeed there had been no harvests, from that very day on "I will bless you", because God through Haggai hoped for their immediate repentance that day. See on Hag. 1:8. There was no seed in the barns for sowing. They faced real starvation. Hence God promises to give them miraculous blessing from that day, immediately, if they responded from the heart. They had no seed to sow, therefore it was no good promising them a better harvest next time. They needed food there and then.

Haggai 2:20 *The Word of Yahweh came the second time to Haggai in the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying-* This must be the same 24th day of the ninth month which has been twice mentioned (:10,15). As expounded above, on that very day Haggai had begged for repentance, and invited them to make a note of the day and to see how God's blessing would be poured out afterwards, whereas before that it had been withheld. Haggai had declared this day a watershed. And now we have a prophecy which seems to assure Zerubbabel that he would in fact be made the Messianic ruler. Perhaps he did repent that day, and so God eagerly went ahead in the following prophecy and assured him that he could indeed achieve the Messianic potential he had.

Haggai 2:21 *Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, 'I will shake the heavens and the earth-* The repetition of "I will" is as if to say that the promise of major Divine intervention and the re-establishment of the Kingdom promised in :6 (see note there) would not come about, whereas its fulfilment had been in question. This would fit the suggestion made on :20 that Zerubbabel repented and so the Divine program and possibilities with him resumed.

The day when heaven and earth would be shaken was the day when the second temple was to be filled with glory as Ezekiel had said. *Then*, there would be major war between the Gentile nations, and Zerubbabel would be some kind of Messiah figure. But none of these things happened. Their fulfilment was delayed until the last days, when all nations who come against Jerusalem will slay each other, and "my servant" the Lord Jesus will be proclaimed as Messiah. *Then*, in our time of the end, the heavens and earth will be shaken (Heb. 12:26,27). It could have happened while the second temple was standing- but it didn't, thanks to Israel's indolence.

2:21-23 is a sad ending to the prophecy. The idea is clearly enough that Zerubbabel would become king and the whole planet would be brought under his reign, with the thrones of all kingdoms uprooted by him. Zech. 4:9; 6:12 likewise prophecy that Zerubbabel would complete his intended work. But that didn't happen. At best Zerubbabel just disappears from the scene, and according to tradition he returned to Babylon and gave up on the restoration. The essence will be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, but this, like Ez. 40-48 and the prophecies there about "the prince", is a detailed potential prophecy about a man that just never came true.

Haggai 2:22 *I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations. I will overthrow the chariots, and those who ride in them. The horses and their riders will come down, everyone by the sword of his brother-* Haggai 2:6,7 clearly stated that *very soon* the desire of all nations would come to the temple, and Yahweh would fill the temple with His glory, just as He had when the first temple was built (this is another proof that the temple of the restoration was to be based upon the pattern of Solomon's). This was to be brought about by Yahweh

shaking all nations, with the result that in a great battle, they would kill each other; and *then* Zerubbabel “my servant” (a Messianic title) would be the King of God’s Kingdom. But this didn’t happen “soon” after those words were spoken. Indeed, they are quoted in Heb. 12 as now having relevance to our last days. “I will overthrow...kingdoms” is the language of Dan. 2:44- perhaps it could have been that four kings arose after Nebuchadnezzar and then Babylon would have been destroyed. Thus Dan. 2:42 speaks of *the* singular Kingdom being divided, as if referring to the Kingdom of Babylon / Nebuchadnezzar. Thus the image stood complete when the stone hit it- the whole dynasty of Nebuchadnezzar was to be destroyed. But this didn’t happen, and so other interpretations of the image prophecy became possible, each fitting perhaps less accurately than the intended fulfilment would have done. Likewise Haggai 2:22 continues by saying that in that “overthrow”, “the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother”. This is the language of Zech. 14:13; that prophecy also could have had a fulfilment at the restoration, but it is now deferred until the last days. That same passage also envisages an earthquake around Mount Zion, preparing a plateau upon which the temple could be built, as required in the temple plans of Ez. 40.

In the immediate context, the prophecies of Haggai encouraged the Jews to persevere with building the temple; but clearly he expresses the agenda that this will become a kingdom that will take over other kingdoms. The adversaries of Judah made exactly this point to the Persian emperor. They weren't wrong nor exaggerating. The fact the decree was given to re-start the temple building program is therefore real evidence of the amazing hand of God moving the hearts of men to go against all that is sensible or rational. This is the power of His Spirit on the human heart. For in the Ancient Near East, temple building was definitely associated with political power; it was never merely religious. And Darius encouraged the Jews to build the temple with all that was implied by it.

In his memoir known as the book of Ezra, Ezra is asking us to join him in pondering whether he had been right to accept material help from Persia in order to teach God's law to the people in Judah, whilst at the same time reinforcing Persian control over Judah. Haggai a generation earlier had rebuked Zerubbabel: "Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, 'I will shake the heavens and the earth. I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations. I will overthrow the chariots, and those who ride in them. The horses and their riders will come down, everyone by the sword of his brother' (Hag. 2:21,22). I take this as a rebuke, because Zerubbabel was being told that Yahweh would bring down the Persian empire, whose puppet and "governor" he was. The focus of God's people should have been upon the total freedom and glory of Zion, inhabited by the returned exiles, as spoken of in Isaiah.

Haggai 2:23 *In that day, says Yahweh of Armies, will I take you, Zerubbabel, My servant, the son of Shealtiel', says Yahweh, 'and will make you as a signet ring, for I have chosen you', says Yahweh of Armies-* Setting as a signet ring effectively means Divine appointment as the king of Judah, as in Jer. 22:23-25. The re-established kingdom could have had a Divinely appointed Messianic king in the line of David, Zerubbabel. Just a few months later, Zech. 3:8 speaks of "My servant the branch", a clear reference to Zerubbabel, "branch of God", as the Messianic ruler figure. God says He will do this; but it seems Zerubbabel didn't want it, and the people weren't ready or willing for it. And so the prophecy in essence is reapplicable to the Lord Jesus, the "My servant" of Isaiah's prophecies.

Dan. 9:25 appears to identify “the anointed one, a prince” with the restoration of Jerusalem after the return. The Masoretic punctuation of Dan. 9:25 actually suggests that ‘Messiah the prince’ appears after the first seven of the seventy weeks- perhaps there was the possibility 49 day-years after the command to rebuild Jerusalem for a Messiah to have appeared? This would’ve fitted Zerubbabel perfectly. Lk. 3:27 describes Zerubbabel as the head / chief / leader. The term Rhesa is incorrectly rendered in many versions as a name. Perhaps Luke’s point was that the Lord Jesus was the final Messiah, after the failure of so many potential ones beforehand. ‘Zerubbabel the chief’ would then be a similar rubric to “David the king” in Matthew’s genealogy (Mt. 1:16). Zerubbabel was the ‘head’ of the house of David (Ezra 4:3; Hag. 2:23; Zech. 3:8; 6:12,13), as was his descendant Hattush (Ezra 8:1-3 cp. 1 Chron. 3:22). As the grandson of Jehoiachin, Judah’s exiled king, Zerubbabel would’ve been the legitimate king of Judah. Potentially, Hos. 1:11 could have come true: “Judah and... Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head [Zerubbabel?]; and they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel” (RSV). And perhaps as head of the house of David, Zerubbabel was intended to be the “David my servant” who would be the one king and one shepherd who would lead Israel back to the land from exile (Ez. 37:22,24). Significantly, Neh. 7:7 describes Zerubbabel as being at the head of twelve leaders of the returning exiles, who are called “the people of Israel” (cp. Ezra 2:2).

Zerubbabel like his people simply didn’t live up to it; and the prophecies came to be fulfilled finally in Jesus. He could have been Yahweh’s signet ring (Hag. 2:23), His specially favoured son- but he balked at the height of the calling. These things remain a continual challenge to we who likewise have so much Spirit-enabled potential. Zech. 6:12,13 repeats this prophecy that Zerubbabel would be king: "he shall bear royal honor, and shall sit upon his throne and rule. There shall be a priest by his throne". We have here a clear example of a potential prophecy; like Cyrus, Zerubbabel was specifically named as having a future which didn't materialize for him. Because he and others chose for that not to happen. This helps us understand how the detailed command / prophecy of Ez. 40-48 was all likewise potential, as in fact are all of the restoration prophecies. The Davidic line from Jeconiah had been cursed by Jeremiah, saying that no offspring of "Coniah" would sit on the throne (Jer. 22:30). However, Zerubbabel was of the main Davidic line through Solomon and Jeconiah. This is stressed in the Lord's genealogy in Mt. 1:12,13: "Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud". Again we see how God's prophetic plan and even His curses are open to renegotiation. Zerubbabel the cursed not to be king could have become king. But he failed to live up to the potential, and so God's word of curse still came true.

However we can also argue that Zerubbabel's mysterious disappearance from the narrative is not necessarily his fault. Haggai is appealing to the Jews to rebuild the temple. Had they done so, then the Persian empire would have fallen and the Messianic Kingdom conditions would have been given by God, miraculously. And part of that scene would have been that Zerubbabel would have been the Messianic king. But the temple wasn't built as commanded, therefore the Messianic scenario didn't come about, and so Zerubbabel just disappears from the narrative. And the Persian empire didn't suddenly fall as if in an earthquake, shaken, overthrown and destroyed (:21,22), but continued another 200 years. And yet at the start of the reign of Darius, the Persian kingdom was divided and at risk of collapse. "After the assassination of Pseudo-Smerdis in September 522, there were rebellions in Susiana, Babylonia, Persia, Middle Assyria, Armenia and other provinces of the Persian

empire. Darius had to fight [for some time] before authority was established". The prophecies of Persia's destruction show that it could've happened at that time- for Haggai and Zechariah prophesied at the start of the reign of Darius. But because the exiles weren't ready and didn't really want the Kingdom, the Persian empire stabilized and continued. Just as because the exiles didn't really want to rebuild the temple, the Persians decreed that they cease.