

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

LESSON SERIES

Old Testament Survey - Unit VII
Prophets during the Period of the Return and Restoration
The Books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

for

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PROPHETS OF THE RETURN and RESTORATION**THE BOOK OF HAGGAI**

The prophet Haggai was the first of the prophets of the period known as the RETURN FROM EXILE AND THE RESTORATION.

We recall that Jerusalem and Judah were captured by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar in three main installments - the captivities of 606 B.C., 598 B.C., and 586 B.C., when Jerusalem was captured, looted and burned. The land was stripped of nearly all its inhabitants, who were taken into Babylonian exile.

In 536 B.C., Cyrus, king of Persia, with the aid of the Medes, captured the city of Babylon and took possession of the Babylonian Empire. Almost immediately afterward, Cyrus issued a decree granting the Jews in the Babylonian captivity permission to return to Jerusalem and re-build the Temple and the city.

Some 50,000 Jewish exiles took advantage of the decree of Cyrus and returned to their homeland, arriving there within the next year or two for the work of re-building.

Haggai, and his contemporary and colleague, the prophet Zechariah, belong to the period of this first return of exiles from Babylon under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the first governor of Judah, and Joshua his high priest.

The little we know about Haggai is gathered from the messages he delivered and recorded in this short book. He exalted the Lord, not himself; he was God's messenger - "Thus saith the Lord"; he not only rebuked, he cheered and encouraged; he not only preached, he practiced.

"The second year of Darius" enables us to pinpoint the year in which this prophecy was given. (Hystaspis - the Darius mentioned here) began to reign in 521 B.C. In the second year of his reign then would be 520 B.C. And since Haggai gives us the exact month and day of each discourse, it is possible to date his messages with the greatest accuracy, something most unusual in books of Scripture, or in most other ancient books.

- The first message was delivered on September 1, 520 B.C.;
- The second, September 24;
- The third, October 21;
- The fourth and fifth, December 24.

Haggai's five discourses were delivered within the short space of four months.

Getting back to a finishing the reconstruction and refurbishing of the Temple were the supreme passion of this prophet. Work had begun on the Temple shortly after the exiles had arrived at Jerusalem sixteen years earlier, but for various reasons the work was stopped.

The prophet in these discourses reprimands the Jews for spending all their time on their private homes and businesses, and thus delaying for sixteen years the building the Lord's house. He exhorts them to begin on the Temple NOW!

The prophet as spokesman for the Lord, addresses Zerubbabel the governor, Joshua the high priest, and the people, as follows: Do not belittle your Temple and its prospects, because it does not compare in your eyes with the glories of Solomon's Temple. For "my Spirit abides with you" says the Lord, "and in a little while, with the treasuries of all nations, I will fill this house with splendor" (2:1-9).

Then speaking to the priests through a parable on cleanness and uncleanness, teaches Judah a lesson on the seriousness of neglecting the Lord's work. He explains why their crops and businesses have failed and promises renewed blessings for their obedience (2:10-19).

In his last message, the prophet addresses the governor on the future of Israel, when it will have freedom and an opportunity to realize its spiritual hopes.

The book of Haggai is a book of encouragement and hope. Haggai may not have added much to the sum total of prophecy in an era when so many voices had spoken, but the little that he contributed was of great value. Israel was at a critical moment in its history; and what the prophet said, and did, was both timely and vigorous. The message of Haggai was practical. It was simple and factual as $2+2=4$. This prophecy has much in common with the epistle of James. Both put the emphasis upon the daily grind. Action is spiritual. A "do-nothing" attitude is wicked. Both place this yardstick down upon life. Work is the measure of life.

Haggai's contemporary, Zechariah, was visionary, and had his head in the clouds, but pragmatic Haggai had both feet on the ground. **The man of action and the dreamer need to walk together.** I Corinthians 15:58 can appropriately be written over this book.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

I. September 1, 520 B.C., A CHALLENGE To the People, Chapter 1:1-11

1. A Charge of Conflict of Interest, 1:1-4
2. A Call to Consider Their Ways, 1:5-7
3. A Command to Construct the Temple, 1:8-11

II. September 24, 520 B.C., The RESPONSE to the Challenge, Chapter 1:12-15

1. Construction of the Temple; People Obeyed, 1:12
2. Confirmation from God, 1:13,15

III. October 21, 520 B.C., The DISCOURAGEMENT of the People; The **ENCOURAGEMENT** of the Lord, Chapter 2:1-9 - (The inferiority of the 2nd Temple to the 1st Temple became a cause of discouragement, but God responded.)

IV. December 24, 520 B.C., An **APPEAL** to the Law; The **EXPLANATION** of the Principle, Chapter 2:10-19

V. December 24, 520 B.C., A **REVELATION** of God's Program; An **EXPECTATION** for the Future

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

The prophet Zechariah was a contemporary and colleague of the prophet Haggai and like Haggai belongs to the period of the first return of exiles from Babylon and the building of the second Temple, 536-516 B.C. (Ezra 5:1, 6:14). But unlike Haggai, who was a layman, Zechariah was a priest of the tribe of Levi, the grandson of Iddo, a famous priest and head of one of the priestly families that returned with the exiles under Zerubbabel. Moreover, Zechariah, the grandson, must have been a young man, and born in the Babylonian exile (2:4). Thus like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Zechariah was a priest as well as a prophet.

Zechariah, whose name means whom Jehovah remembers, is identified (1:1) as the son of Berechiah, which means Jehovah blesses, and his father was the son Iddo, which means the appointed time. Certainly this cluster of names with such rich meanings is suggestive of the encouragement given to the remnant - **GOD REMEMBERS AND BLESSES IN THE APPOINTED TIME.**

The Jewish Targum states that Zechariah was slain in the sanctuary, and Josephus states that Zechariah, the son of Baruchus, was slain in the Temple. There are those who identify Zechariah as the one mentioned by our Lord as having been martyred (Matthew 23:35).

The time of Zechariah's prophesying is specifically stated in his book. We recall that one of the first things the returned exiles did was to begin to lay the foundation of the Temple. But because of their feuds with the Samaritians and other surrounding enemies, and because they were more interested in building and re-establishing their own homes and businesses, they neglected and postponed the building of the house of the Lord, until the latter half of 520 B.C.

Uniting his efforts with Haggai's in exhorting the leaders of the Jewish colony to resume work on the house of God, Zechariah delivered the messages which are recorded in his book.

- Zechariah's first discourse was delivered to the people in **November, 520 B.C.**, about two months after Haggai delivered his first two prophecies. (1:1).
- Following this opening address, Zechariah, three months later, **on February 24, 519 B.C.**, delivered his first series of Visions (1:7).
- The final series was delivered on **December 4, 518 B.C.** (7:1).

Although the purpose of the book of Zechariah is essentially the same as that of the book of Haggai, namely, to encourage the people to go forward without further delay and rebuild the Temple, the methods of the two prophets are strikingly different.

They both agreed that the Temple was the center and symbol of their Return and Restoration from exile, and of God's over-ruling and protecting presence. They both agreed also on the necessity of re-building the Temple **NOW**. But here the similarity ends.

Haggai, apparently an old man, wrote a plain, simple though vigorous message. It was direct and brief, and with no poetic flights of fancy such as is common among the Hebrew prophets.

Zechariah, on the contrary, was a young man, and composed a poetic prophecy, patterned somewhat after the manner of the great poet and prophet Isaiah.

However, the prophet Zechariah went far beyond Isaiah in his use of figures and symbols to present his prophecies. His book definitely belongs to the **apocalyptic** type literature, such as we found in our study of the books of Ezekiel and Daniel, and as we may see illustrated also in the New Testament by the Apostle John's book of Revelation.

The body of Zechariah's book consists of two series of Visions.

- The Visions recorded in chapters 1 to 6 are concerned primarily with **contemporary** events, especially with the re-building of the Temple.
- The visions of the second half of the book deal chiefly with the **Future**, with special emphasis upon the coming of the Messiah and the glory of His reign.

These two series of visions were separated roughly by a period of two years.

A vision is something seen. An apocalyptic vision is a revelation or unveiling of something hitherto unknown. The veil between heaven and earth is lifted, so to speak, and God's prophetic servant is permitted to see what is not commonly seen by ordinary men.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

I. APOCALYPTIC Visions (Messianic and Millennial), Chapters 1-6

1. Introduction and message of WARNING, 1:1-6
2. TEN VISIONS (all in one night), 1:7-6:15
 1. Riders Under Myrtle Trees, 1:7-17
 2. Four Horns, 1:18,19
 3. Four Smiths, 1:20,21
 4. Man with Measuring Line, chapter 2
 5. Joshua and Satan, 3:1-7
 6. The Branch, 3:8-10
 7. Lampstand and two Olive Trees, chapter 4

8. Flying Roll, 5:5-11
9. Woman in the Ephah, 5:5-11
10. Four Chariots, chapter 6

II. HISTORIC Interlude, chapters 7,8

1. QUESTION Concerning a Religious Ritual (Fasting), 7:1-3
2. Threefold ANSWER, 7:4-8:23
 1. When Heart is Right, the Ritual is Right, 7:4-7
 2. When Heart is Wrong, the Ritual is wrong, 7:8-14
 3. God's Purpose Concerning Jerusalem Unchanged by Any Ritual, chapter 8

III. PROPHETIC Burdens, Chapters 9-14

1. First Burden: Prophetic Aspects Connected with 1st Coming of Christ, chapters 9-11
2. Second Burden: Prophetic Aspects Connected with 2nd Coming of Christ, chapters 12-14.

THE BOOK OF MALACHI

The book of Malachi is the last of the books of prophecy on the Return and Restoration of Israel at Jerusalem, and also the last book of Old Testament Scripture.

All we know of the prophet Malachi is what we gather from reading his book. Malachi means "my messenger." The Septuagint gives its meaning as angel. An angel was a messenger, and could be either human or spiritual. There are some who conclude, therefore, that Malachi is only a title, and the name of this prophet is not known. Others have suggested that he was a spiritual angel, but there are no grounds for this. The message, not the messenger, is the important issue.

We recall that one of the first acts of King Cyrus of Persia was to issue a edict (536 B.C.) granting permission to Jewish exiles in Babylon to return to Jerusalem, to re-build their Temple and to establish their homes in Judah.

There was great enthusiasm on the part of the remnant 50,000 or so who returned. However, after building the foundation of the Temple, work on the house of the Lord stopped for various reasons. Moreover, as time passed their initial enthusiasm waned, as their high hopes of the early days were not fulfilled. They suffered from drought and bad crops and famine, as Haggai in his book tells us. And it was not until 520-516 B.C., under the leadership of Haggai and Zechariah, that they had re-built the Temple.

Now by the time of Malachi (397 B.C.), about one hundred and forty years after the first arrival of exiles under Zerubbabel, the people and their leaders had not only lost much of their initial enthusiasm for re-building Jerusalem and Judah, but they had become lukewarm in their faith. They began to question the love of God and the justice of His rule. They saw evil-doers prospering in the sight of the Lord. So there seemed to be no profit in trying to keep His commandments. Even the priests were lax in the performance of their duties, and permitted the people to corrupt the Lord's worship.

A custom and tradition of great sanctity regarding marriage was often violated. Jewish men divorced the wives of their youth in order to marry foreign and pagan wives; and even officials of high rank were equally guilty of this practice along with the common people. It is such a time as this that the prophet Malachi, God's messenger, was sent to Israel with as bold Message.

Malachi, who was the messenger of the Lord, delighted in using his own name when referring to other messengers. He made 3 such references.

- He referred to Levi as the messenger of the Lord (2:7). This suggest that every witness of God is an **angel** of the Lord.
- He announced the coming of John the Baptist as "my Messenger" (3:1). John the Baptist was the Malachi of the New Testament and began where Malachi of the old Testament left off. Malachi was the first radio announcer who said, "The next voice you will hear will be that of the Lord's messenger."
- He also made the definite reference to Christ as the "messenger of the covenant" (3.1). The angel of the Lord of the Old Testament is the pre-incarnate Christ.

The method adopted by Malachi is to quote a declaration or interrogation God makes to Israel. Then he gives Israel's answer, which is sarcasm. Finally, he gives God's telling reply, which is equally biting sarcasm.

Malachi's prophecy reveals an age deadened to sin. They were drugged to an unconsciousness of sin. They were in a spiritual stupor with no conviction, which is the lowest state of sin. They mouthed surprise that God would find fault. They were peevish petulant children who affected ignorance. They pretended to know everything but were lacking in a knowledge of essentials.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF MALACHI

1. The LOVE OF GOD for Israel, 1:1-5
2. The PRIESTS REPROVED for Profanity, 1:6-2:9
3. The PEOPLE REBUKED for Social Sins, 2:10-17
4. The PREDICTION of the TWO MESSENGERS, 3:1-6
5. The PEOPLE REBUKED for Religious Sins, 3:7-18
6. The PREDICTION of the DAY OF THE LORD and the SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS who Ushers it in, chapter 4

END of Lesson

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