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Preface

It is no overstatement to say that Haggai is a neglected book. Hidden away in the back of the Old Testament, it is often forgotten and ignored. Being a mere two chapters long, Haggai's prophecy is easy to miss. This booklet consists of five expositions that were originally prepared as sermons for my congregation. At the beginning, I had to remind the congregation where to find Haggai: "You'll find it at the end of the Old Testament, right before Zechariah and Malachi." However, by the end, we all knew where it was and what it was about.

Haggai's prophecy may be small, but his message is much needed for our day. He speaks of a believer's priorities to a time in which priorities are often badly askew. He speaks of the covenant to a time in which the biblical reality of God's covenant is often neglected. He speaks of God's house to an age in which many Christians have only a limited understanding of what God's house is and its significance. We need Haggai and his message for today.

In these expositions I have provided a basic explanation of the book. Along the way, I have also tried to show how this book speaks to us of Christ and the gospel. There are also applications drawn from the text. However, God's Word is rich enough that there is room for further discussion and I have suggested some directions that discussion and further reflection could take.

Let me express a word of gratitude to the consistory of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church of Hamilton for originally suggesting I preach through this book. It was a blessing to me personally and, I trust, also for our congregation. My prayer is that, by God's grace and for his glory, it will also bless and enrich you, dear reader.

Wes Bredenhof
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Haggai 1:1-11

Put God's House First

Haggai is just a little book and easily overlooked. If I were to randomly ask you what the book of Haggai is about, you would likely be grasping for an answer. In Acts 20, the apostle Paul said that he made it his goal to preach the whole counsel or will of God. We need that too. We need to hear from the full range of what the Bible teaches. We also need what the little prophecy of Haggai has to say to us.

To begin with, we have to become familiar with the historical background. Along with Zechariah and Malachi, this is one of the last books to be written in the Old Testament, about 500 years before Christ. We're near the end of the most traumatic event of the Old Testament era: the exile into Babylon. Because of their sins and rebellion, God disciplined his people by sending most of them out of the Promised Land for seventy years. After a decree by Cyrus king of Persia, a return began in about 538 BC. You can read about all that at the end of 2 Chronicles 36. Jews started trickling back to Jerusalem and the land of Israel.

The first ones who returned saw the work that needed to be done, especially the work on the temple. Ezra 3 describes how that work began. The altar was rebuilt and sacrifices began to be offered again. The foundations were laid for the rebuilding of the temple and when that happened there was praise for God. There was also weeping because some remembered the temple of Solomon and its grandeur. It was a day of mixed emotions.

The Jews who returned early on made a good start. But soon afterwards opposition arose from the Samaritans. In the New Testament, we find a hostile relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans which dates from this era. The Samaritans had been transplanted into the Promised Land.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. One of the features of Haggai is the use of rhetorical questions – questions are asked to which the answer may or should be obvious. We see an example of this in verse 4 of chapter 1. What purpose might these rhetorical questions serve?
2. The temple of God is mentioned in several different ways in the New Testament. One of them is the new heavens and new earth. Revelation 21:3 says that God will make his dwelling with men. The entire new creation becomes the temple of God. How does Haggai 1:1-11 relate to this truth?
3. Reflect on or discuss what this passage reveals directly or indirectly about each person of the Holy Trinity.
4. Besides the examples mentioned above in the exposition, identify more places in the New Testament where we read of God's chastisement. Why are so many people reluctant to take this teaching seriously today?
5. What are some of the rationalizations that you use to deprioritize the building of God's temple? What does repentance look like for you here?