

## **“God: The Best Coach”**

### **Haggai 2: 1-9**

1 In the second year of King Darius, on the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: 2 “Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, 3”Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? 4 But now be strong, Zerubbabel,’ declares the Lord. ‘Be strong Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the Lord, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the Lord Almighty. 5 ‘This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.’

6 “This is what the Lord almighty says: ‘In a little while, I will one more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. 7 I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the Lord Almighty. 8 “The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the Lord Almighty. 9 “The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the Lord Almighty.

### **Zechariah 7:1-14**

In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Kislev. 2 The people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-Melek, together with their men to entreat the Lord 3 by asking the priests of the house of the Lord Almighty and the prophets, “Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?”

4 Then the word of the Lord Almighty came to me: 5 “Ask all the people of the land and the priests, ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted? 6 And when you were eating and drinking were you not just feasting for yourselves? 7 Are these not the words the Lord proclaimed through the earlier prophets when Jerusalem and its surrounding towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled?’”

8 And the word of the Lord came again to Zechariah: 9 “This is what the Lord Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. 10 Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.’ 11 “But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and covered their ears. 12 They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by His Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the Lord Almighty was very angry.

13 When I called, they did not listen; so then they called, I would not listen,’ says the Lord Almighty. 14 I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations, where they were strangers. The land they left behind them was so desolate that no one traveled through it. This is how they made the pleasant land desolate.”

**[NOTE 1]** To understand this prophecy it is helpful to have a little background as to the circumstances the people were experiencing when they received it. The Jews had started to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem after 70 years in exile. But they had become satisfied with the little bit of work success they'd had erecting the altar so that the sacrifices and the temple worship could be resumed according to the Law. They had turned their attention then toward their own homes. Their homes were paneled, while the temple remained basically in ruins, just barely together well enough for the sacrifices to be made. Haggai needed to awaken the priests and the people to their duty. In more colloquial terms, the people needed a good swift kick in the pants. So on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month, most likely akin to our October, God, through the prophet Haggai, challenged the people. The people responded to this proverbial good swift kick and began to rebuild the temple once more. They got their priorities straightened out and the Lord was with them, He blessed them.

The book of Zechariah was written two years later. Zechariah is the longest of the 12 books in the subset called the Minor Prophets. The book of Zechariah is also the most frequently quoted of the Minor Prophets. There are 71 different quotations or allusions to Zechariah in the New Testament. The name Zechariah means "Yahweh remembers." What makes Zechariah, as a prophet, stand out is that he was of the tribe of Levi which means that he was both a priest and a prophet. It is interesting that Haggai's ministry lasted only five months whereas Zechariah's ministry, it seems, could have lasted as long as 50 years.

This particular book is mainly concerned with the Jews asking about fasting. The Lord tells them that fasting needs to be done in secret with the idea of focusing solely on God. So the fasting must be for God and no-one or no-thing else. It leads to the question of us: "Are we serving ourselves or God?" "Are we listening to God or ourselves?"

**[NOTE 2]** Haggai is dealing with the obstacles to the rebuilding and getting the people motivated again and Zechariah comes along 2 years later and is dealing with the people's attitude toward God. Let's start with the obstacles that caused the Israelites to get distracted from rebuilding the temple. Well, first there were the psychological obstacles to rebuilding. One was complacency because they had gotten the altar rebuilt so the sacrifices could resume. But the main obstacle is hinted at in verse 3. In verse 3 Haggai asks, 'Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now?' If you look at the book of Ezra chapter three and verses 12 and 13 you get even more insight. "But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, ..." The people were discouraged before they had hardly gotten started because they knew that the finished product would not even be a shadow of what the finished temple that Solomon had built was. This is the typical cause for procrastination: you look at the huge project all at once and you quickly become discouraged when you don't make a lot of progress. It feels like you will never get it

done because in light of the whole project each day you only make a tiny bit of progress.

For me it is like the difference between framing carpentry and finish carpentry. When I was working as a carpenter in the mid-80's I could see the basic frame of a decent sized house go up in two or three days. Each day you see significant change and progress. Whereas you might work two or three days and get a few doors and a couple windows trimmed and it looks nicer but the difference isn't anywhere as dramatic. The work feels like it is getting nowhere.

So for the Israelites there are two things at work here. They are thinking that the temple will never be as nice as it was, so why bother doing it at all? And secondly, rebuilding the temple is such a big project and the progress is so sloooowww, that it is hard to maintain motivation. Your interest in the project wanes as progress is hard to see. When you work day after day and you see little progress it is discouraging.

The first few weeks the Israelites were most likely busy redressing stone that was still fit for use, testing the safety of the walls, and organizing teams of workmen for each area and for specific tasks. But with relatively primitive tools this progress could not have been very noticeable or fast. The work was very difficult and it taxed the endurance of even the most enthusiastic people. It became much easier to work on their own homes where the progress was much faster and easier to see. They could also see the personal benefit and reap the benefits much quicker. In plain simple English, they were getting more tangible rewards for working on their own homes, more bang for their buck, so to speak. The older ones remembered how beautiful and full of awesome splendor the temple Solomon built had been and they just knew that this new temple would fall short big-time! When they looked at the foundation and the resources available to rebuild the temple they couldn't help but weep.

There were other problems as well. Besides the Sabbath day rests, every week, the first day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month was the Feast of Trumpets which lasted a full week, the 7<sup>th</sup> day of this 7<sup>th</sup> month or last day of the Feast was the Day of Atonement, and the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month was the beginning of the Feast of Booths which also lasted a week. It was forbidden to work on these holidays so they got into a rhythm of working a few days or weeks and then taking a vacation. It is hard to get much accomplished when you have a lot of interruptions. So the progress was very slow and this made them even less motivated. So, the people had been working on the wall on and off for almost a month when God speaks through the prophet Haggai for the second time. **[NOTE 3]**

It is at this particular time that God gives Haggai a message of encouragement for the people. Haggai addresses the older ones who are mourning because they are sure that the new temple won't be able to hold a candle to the old temple. God tells them through Haggai, "Be strong, work hard and know that I am with you." Verse 4, "For I am with you," declares the Lord almighty. The RSV translates the words as "take courage." Just prior to this in verse 3 Haggai acknowledges their situation and gives them permission to feel discouraged. You are right, the new temple may not have the

splendor of the first one BUT ... God has power. It is Okay to hurt, our trials will cause us pain, but in our pain, we need to hear God saying, "take courage for I am with you!" No, they didn't have the architects, the experts, or the Ark with its cherubim, tablets of stone, pots of manna, and the staff of Aaron, But they had God Himself.

When things don't go the way you want them to, when you are dealing with trials, temptations, or difficult times remember that you have God on your side! If God is for us, who can be against us? If God is for us, it doesn't matter if the whole world is against us, we will still win! The Israelites forgot that God, ... not Solomon ... filled the temple with glory. The personal presence of the Lord gives courage, determination, and conviction that He will not permit His cause to fail. He will Not! In Matthew 14:27 and Mark 6:50 Jesus says, "Take heart, it is I, have no fear!" You see the personal presence of the Lord gives you whatever you stand in need of to meet the goal. When we are in a rebuilding process, we need to know that God is with us. When we've been working for what seems like an eternity on a problem or project and we see little progress, we need to fight that feeling of discouragement and BE STRONG! We need to keep working, knowing that God is with us! Is there anything too difficult for God? God can give this temple, no matter what size it is, no matter what it looks like physically, even more glory than the temple Solomon built. You see it is God that counts, not the building, not the people, not the money, but God and our relationship with Him! That is absolutely **exactly** what counts! [NOTE 4]

In the Zechariah passage chapter 7 and verses 11-13 we read, "But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. 12 They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by His Spirit through the earlier prophets." The people refused to listen! Then God goes on to say, through Zechariah, "13 When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen," says the Lord." That is scary. Please don't turn away from God, seek to listen to Him through prayer and reading His Word, studying your Bible, and thinking deeply about how to apply that Word to your life.

In verse 5 God refers back to His covenant with His people. In essence Haggai asks them to remember the Exodus, remember the Manna from heaven, remember the water that poured out from a rock, remember the parting of the Red Sea and the stoppage of the Jordan River. As God was with you then, He will be with you now! To a struggling people God says, "I am with you!" The covenant, broken by Judah's faithlessness is renewed by God's steadfast love. We can NOT do it in our own power. Jesus told the disciples plainly, "Apart from me you can do nothing!" We need the help of a higher power as did the Israelites. God will provide through His Holy Spirit, whatever it is that we lack. You see the people had just finished the Feast of Booths, where they remembered the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings. It was fresh in their minds. Haggai says to them, remember how God was with you before, that is exactly how He will be with you moving forward, that is how He IS with you now. Some of the people were trying to live in the past. They were remembering how good the past was

and using it as an excuse for doing nothing in the present. Past failure needs to be forgotten except to learn from it and not repeat the mistakes of the past. Paul tells us in his letter to the Philippians chapter 3 and verse 13, “forget what is behind, strain toward what is ahead, and press on toward the goal.” **[NOTE 5]**

Life may not ever be like it was in the past, material goods and relationships may have to be left behind, but God has a message for us; “I am with you, be strengthened, take courage and do not fear.” There is hope. That is what Haggai gave the Israelites and that is what I want you to get from God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through me this morning ... HOPE! To those people living in the past God says, “I will fill this house with glory.” It was me who gave the first temple its glory and I will give this temple a glory even greater than before.” What God did, in effect, was assure the Israelites of ultimate success. He does the same for you and me today! We know that when all is said and done, we win in the end! We will be with Christ in paradise! We must trust in the Lord and have faith! Be strong and courageous!

In verse 9 God says to the Israelites through Haggai, “I will grant peace to this place.” To the average person in the United States today, we think, “oh, that means there will be no war.” But the Hebrew word is Shalom. Shalom refers to the sum of all blessings possible. God was saying to them that from the temple all blessings would flow. God comes to be with His people, not because of anything they did or that we do, but because in His covenant faithfulness, His mercy, and His love, He gives Himself to dwell among us. First He did it through prophets, then He did it in the human flesh of His Son Jesus Christ, and now He dwells among us in the person of the Holy Spirit. Time and time again you see it. When God’s people needed to be challenged, God challenged them. When the Israelites needed encouragement, God gave them encouragement. The author Mike Breen saw this in Jesus’ life as well. He calls it “Invitation” and “Challenge”. Jesus demonstrated in his life a wonderful balance between invitation and challenge. **[NOTE 6]**

I played organized football for 10 years, three of those years in college. I have coached Rocket Football for ages 10-12 for 5 or 6 seasons, plus I competed in track and swimming all four years of high school and have coached some in both of those sports. I have read a lot about successful coaches and learned about good and bad coaches through personal experience. The one thing that I have noticed about the best coaches (based on win/loss and improvement of athletes) is that they have an innate ability to know when people need to be challenged and when they need a good swift kick in the butt, and when athletes need to be encouraged or built up. The good coaches yell at you when you do it wrong but the best coaches are just as quick to praise you when you do something right. The same principle applies to parenting. It is necessary to know when children need discipline and when they need encouragement. I have recently seen that dogs in general do better and like people faster that are consistent in that they give a quick NO when they do something wrong and a quick “good dog” when they do

something right. With children we need to be quick to discipline and quick to praise them at the same time. May God grant us wisdom.

God is all-knowing. He created us! He knows us better than we know ourselves. God knows when we need to be challenged and He knows when we need to be encouraged. In my mind, that makes Yahweh the world's best coach. And that is exactly why there is Victory in Jesus! Depend on God and we will win the championship ... paradise with Christ. **[NOTE 7]** If you are open and available to God, He will do great things through you. Be found faithful, working with all your heart, when God brings in the future. Know this, no matter what, if you are open to Him, the best coach ever, is willing to be your personal coach. You can have a close personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Let go, let go of whatever it is that is keeping you from giving your life to Christ. Don't let busyness or anything of any kind get in between you and God. Seek Him first and you will be blessed! Listen to the Lord, let Him coach you! It is difficult for God to coach you, lead you, guide you if you are not spending time in His Word, not coming to church, not in a Life Group or Discipleship Group. How easy is it for God to get your attention? Are you giving God ample opportunity to speak to you, to guide you?

What are you going to do about it? Please write down one thing that you will do this week. Write down one way that you will listen to God better? Write down one thing that is interfering with your relationship with God. Write down one thing that you will do to eliminate or stop the interference. Let's Pray ... AMEN.

**Sermon Notes for "God – The Best Coach"**  
**based on Haggai 2: 1-9 & Zechariah 7:1-14**  
**given at Doster Community Church June 19, 2022** 8/2/2026

- I. Haggai needed to awaken the priests and people to their duty. They responded, got their priorities back in order and the Lord blessed them. Zechariah is the longest of "the Minor Prophets". Z was both a priest and a prophet. Z deals with fasting and the people's attitude toward God.
- II. Haggai was dealing with obstacles to rebuilding the wall and getting people motivated.
  - a. Psychological obstacles – complacency and overwhelming discouragement. Focus on negative elephant.
  - b. Very slow progress
  - c. Feasts and partying interrupted progress and momentum
- III. What did God do through Haggai?
  - a. God's message of encouragement, "Be strong, work, and know that I am with you." God told them He was on their side, with them.
  - b. The personal presence of the Lord is everything. If God is for us, who can be against us of any consequence?
- IV. Zechariah comes two years later and the people have "refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears." (Zech 7:11-13). The people refused to listen.
- V. Past failure needs to be forgotten except to learn from it so as to avoid past mistakes. "Forget what is behind, strain toward what is ahead and press on towards the goal" (Philippians 3:13).
- VI. Great coaches have in common an innate ability to know when people need to be challenged, when they need strong motivation, or when they need encouragement and hope. Discipline and Encouragement must be in balance.
- VII. What are you going to do about it? If you are Faithful, Available, and Teachable God can do great things through you. Contemplate your life and let go of whatever may be keeping you from giving all of yourself and your life to Jesus Christ. If you seek Him first, He will bless you.