

“The Devil is in the Discouragement” (Haggai 2:1-23)

I read once that the devil was having a yard sale, and all of his tools were marked with different prices. They were a fiendish lot. There was hatred, jealousy, deceit, lust, pride—all at expensive prices. But over to the side of the yard on display was a tool more obviously worn than any of the other tools. It was also the most costly. The tool was labeled, DISCOURAGEMENT. When questioned, the devil said, “It’s more useful to me than any other tool. When I can’t bring down my victims with any of the rest of these tools, I use discouragement because so few people realize that it belongs to me.”

I’m sure you would agree that discouragement is of the devil. There’s nothing worse than a steady diet of discouragement. Yet, in our age of high expectations we can find a lot to be discouraged about. Perhaps you are discouraged about your marriage. Things just aren’t what you’d like them to be with your spouse. You remember how your relationship used to be when you were first married, yet those days of bliss seem like another lifetime. The same is true with your kids. You have wonderful memories of how things used to be when they were children. Now that your children are teens or adults it seems like you no longer connect. Maybe you recall the glory days of college or a previous job. Those were the best years of your life. It seems that things were much easier and enjoyable back then. Now you feel underpaid, undervalued, and underutilized. It seems like life is passing you by. In your more honest moments, like me, maybe you would acknowledge that you know a thing or two about discouragement.

The good news is that the Lord Himself wants to encourage us. Today, He will tell us that *the remedy for discouragement is to see God’s perspective*. Turn with me to Haggai 2 where we will see three important remedies to discouragement.

1. Stop looking back; start looking ahead (2:1-9). In these nine verses, we will see that God’s people are discouraged because they have a bad memory. After Haggai’s barn-burner of a sermon in 1:2-11, the people responded by beginning to restore the temple. Less than a month later Haggai has to preach a second sermon, because the people are guilty both of dwelling upon the negative and of forgetting the positive altogether. Memory can be a blessing or it can be a curse. For these Jews it had become a heavy burden that hindered their progress. In 2:1-3, Haggai writes, “**On the twenty-first of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet saying, ‘Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people saying, ‘Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison?’**” The people are guilty of looking back instead of looking ahead. Ezra 3:8-13 informs us that the younger people were rejoicing and the older folks were weeping. The older generation remembered the incredible beauty of Solomon’s temple, and as they looked at the present temple it seemed “like nothing” (2:3). To them it seemed to represent all the failure of the past. It was a living symbol of what they had lost 66 years earlier (586 B.C.).¹ Thus, they felt it wasn’t even worth the effort to rebuild because it would never be like the good old days. And yet, the value or significance of a man’s work is not to be estimated by comparing it with the work of others, but by the measure of its conformity to God’s will and purpose. Zerubbabel’s temple seemed insignificant compared to Solomon’s, yet in God’s sight it was a valued and significant part of His overall purpose.

Too often, God’s people play the comparison game. We compare our children and our wives and husbands. We compare what we used to have with what we have now. We remember the past as better than it really was, so the present seems worse than it really is. We need to just do our best with the talents and resources we have, and not compare ourselves or our fruit to others. We must always recognize that God isn’t obligated to treat us in exactly the same way He treats anyone else, nor is He required to treat us today exactly as He did yesterday. Because God is God and we are not, He has the absolute right to do what He pleases. If you think about that fact, it renders all comparisons useless and counterproductive.

Maybe instead of looking back on your former success, you have found yourself looking back on your previous failures. In your personal life, you may have been immoral. Perhaps you forfeited your virginity or committed adultery. This is a great tragedy and the Bible calls this “sin.” Nevertheless, your sin is forgiven. Now God says, “Go and sin no more.” Corporately, you may be feeling like you’ve dropped the ball with your church family because you have not been regularly attending church, nor have you been involved. God calls this “sin,” but again, His message to you is “Go and sin no more!” The only way to overcome your past is by facing it head-on. This requires calling your behavior what it is—“sin!” After confessing your sin to God and anyone else you’ve sinned against, you must move on with the enablement of God. You and I must remind ourselves that it is impossible to make spiritual progress by looking back.

I realize that many who read these words struggle mightily with discouragement and disappointment. Perhaps you expected more from life and feel somewhat cheated by circumstances. It could be that you have been roughly treated by someone who promised to love you forever, or perhaps you have suffered at the hands of your own family. I know many who feel mistreated by those with whom they work every day. It could be that you have had more than your share of sickness and calamity and now wish for a calm sunny day, but none is in sight. You and I must refuse to allow discouragement to get the upper hand on us.

The great reformer, Martin Luther, once was so depressed over a prolonged period that one day his wife came downstairs wearing all black. Martin Luther said, “Who died?” She said, “God has.” He said, “God hasn’t died.” And she said, “Well, live like it and act like it.”² As Lori (my wife) says, “That’s some good ‘wife toast!’” I agree...and some of us need to be “toasted” every once in a while. We need to be reminded that *the remedy for discouragement is to see God’s perspective...* and then to live accordingly.

Haggai continues his sermon in 2:4-5: **“But now take courage, Zerubbabel,’ declares the LORD, ‘take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage,’ declares the LORD, ‘and work; for I am with you,’ declares the LORD of hosts. ‘As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!’”** God addresses the negative emotional reaction of some of the older exiles because it is hard for people to work for God if they don’t feel their work measures up to the ideal. What’s the use? Are we really making any difference? Is it worth the effort? The fear, deep down, is that we’ll be working for nothing, that we’re the losers in the end. Better, then, to stop now. Haggai counters this mentality with the familiar charge, “Take courage” (lit. “take heart”), which appears three times in 2:4. This is one of God’s favorite admonitions in crucial situations. Joshua was encouraged with these words as he faced the awesome responsibility of filling Moses’ shoes and leading Israel in the conquest of Canaan. Again, David also encouraged Solomon with the great task of building the temple years earlier. God wants His people to know He’ll definitely do His part, but we must always do ours! We must be strong and get on with the work!

It may be that one of the reasons you’re discouraged today is because you’re not striving to move forward. Today, God is saying, “Get up and get moving for Me.” Too many of us sit around stewing in our juices when the Lord says, “Get up, My child, and do the work I have called you to do. Be strong in the face of difficulty, and don’t let anything or anyone stop you. Sometimes the best therapy is simply rising from your seat of despair and tackling the job in front of you.

Perseverance seems to be an outdated concept in our day of instant everything. If it doesn’t come easy, why pursue it? If it’s hard or requires endurance, maybe it isn’t your thing. It’s easy to start a new diet. It’s tough to stick to it when you crave that cinnamon roll. It’s easy to start a new exercise program. It’s tough to persevere when your aching muscles scream, “No more!” It’s easy to get married. It’s tough to hang in there and work through problems over a lifetime. It’s easy to begin a new ministry in the local church. It’s tough to keep on when problems arise or when the results don’t match your initial expectations.³

The threefold exhortation to “take courage” is grounded in two promises: The first promise is a link to the past (2:4-5), while the second is linked to the future (2:6-9). The first promise is found in 2:4-5: “I am with you...My Spirit is abiding in your midst.” What is the secret to doing the work of God? It is the presence of God. God promises that He will be with His people. If the Lord has kept His promise through all the intervening centuries, He can be depended upon to maintain His promise.

Why did God remind them of their exodus from Egypt? Because He’s the same God today that He was back then. He still works miracles today. Look at the end of 2:5: “My Spirit is abiding in your midst, do not fear.” Think of the implications of that statement: Abraham is gone, Moses is gone, David is gone, Solomon is gone, but the Holy Spirit is still here! Fear not, be strong, pick up your hammer and your chisel, and keep on working. Don’t look back to the past, don’t worry about who isn’t here. Focus on who is here: the Holy Spirit of God. He abides with His people forever. Therefore, be encouraged. Keep moving forward. Don’t be afraid to tackle an “impossible” project. Don’t be intimidated by daunting circumstances. God has promised to stay with us forever. His Spirit is the fulfillment of that unbreakable promise. We must keep on keeping on, for the Spirit remains with us. Always remember: Because God is present in His church, the work of God is always worthwhile.

In 2:4-5, the Jews were encouraged to continue the work of the temple because God was with them, but the second promise that Haggai gives his people is a future promise: The Messiah is coming and He will fill the temple with glory! In 2:6-9, Haggai declares: **“For thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,’ declares the LORD of hosts. ‘The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘and in this place I will give peace,’ declares the LORD of hosts.”** Verses 6-9 make three specific promises about the future:

- 1) **God will shake the world** (2:6-7a). Hebrews 12:26-27 quotes Haggai 2:6 and applies the “shaking” to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The meaning is this: God shook the earth when He gave Moses the law. Haggai said a day is coming when God is going to shake the earth again. But the next time He will shake the heavens as well.⁴ The day is coming when the entire world will be shaken by God.⁵ I remember when we had a 6.8 earthquake hit Olympia back on Wednesday, February 28th, 2001 at 10:54 a.m. I was just wrapping up a meeting with my secretary, Judy, when all of a sudden the floor starting shaking. We started holding on for dear life to the door frame of my office. It was intense. The seconds seemed to last forever. Yet, this was absolutely nothing compared to what the Lord will bring one day! When this one comes, the whole earth will be shaken apart and everything in which men put their trust will be gone. Money and houses, lands and cars, buildings and wardrobes, all of it wiped out in one brief moment. If you can see it, feel it, touch it, smell it, it will all disappear. Suddenly shaken apart and destroyed. Only eternal things will remain.
- 2) **Jesus will come** (2:7). When the temple is finally built, it will signal the Messiah’s coming. Scholars disagree whether this verse refers to the Messiah or not.⁶ I believe that it does. The NKJV is one of the few translations that agrees. They render the disputed Hebrew phrase “and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations...” making it clear that this verse is Messianic (see NASB reference notes).⁷ For many centuries, Jewish and Christian commentators have agreed that this refers to the Messiah. How can Jesus be called “the Desired of All Nations” when so many do not believe in Him? There are several answers: (1) His coming was expected by the nations. (2) His salvation is needed by all people. (3) He is admired in every nation because He has followers in every nation. (4) He is desired by all who see Him as He is. (5) He will be prized by all in the end. He is the light of the Gentiles and the salvation of the earth. All kings will one day bow before Him. Thus He is—and will ever be—the Desired of All Nations.⁸

- 3) ***The latter glory will be greater than the former glory*** (2:9). But how can that be? Is this only wishful thinking? After all, Solomon’s temple was so vast and magnificent and this temple seems so small and insignificant. For hundreds of years this prophecy would seem impossible. But the day would come when Jesus Himself would walk through the temple precincts in Jerusalem (John 2:13-22). He is the “greater glory” that God promised to the people of Haggai’s day. Five hundred years after Haggai’s temple was complete, Jesus would enter it. He came to offer salvation to all men and to bring peace. If you have never believed in Jesus Christ, the prince of peace, I encourage you to start your New Year by trusting in what Christ has done on your behalf.

Some two months had passed since the last message so in 2:10-19 Haggai preaches his third sermon, which has to do with cause and effect. It seeks to show that since blessing was withheld because of disobedience, now that they are obedient it will surely be granted. The Lord is saying that unless absolute obedience is present, everything is defiled—even sacrificial worship.

2. Press forward in obedience (2:10-19). Haggai begins his third sermon with these words: **“On the twenty-fourth of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Haggai the prophet, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Ask now the priests for a ruling: If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches bread with this fold, or cooked food, wine, oil, or any other food, will it become holy?’ And the priests answered, ‘No.’ Then Haggai said, ‘If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will the latter become unclean?’ And the priests answered, ‘It will become unclean.’ Then Haggai said, ‘So is this people. And so is this nation before Me,’ declares the LORD, ‘and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean”** (2:10-14). Needless to say, these verses sound rather strange to our ears. But everything Haggai said would have made perfect sense to the Jews. They had hundreds of laws governing all aspects of life. Most of those laws had to do with understanding what was holy and what was not. Holy things were objects that had been set apart for God’s use—usually in the temple worship. Because God is holy, only holy objects could come into His presence. An unholy object is not necessarily sinful in itself. For instance, a pot might be holy because it was dedicated to the Lord’s use. But the same pot might be used by a housewife to cook a meal and in that case it would be ordinary or common. In particular, dead bodies were defiled or unclean and anyone touching a dead body himself became unclean.

The point of these five verses is that holiness does not come by contact.⁹ It is not transferable. But contact with unholiness does defile. Take sickness as an example. If you are healthy and your spouse has the flu, and you kiss him or her, will that make your spouse well? Will it make you sick? Who is the only exception to this? Jesus! He touched lots of unclean people: lepers, the woman with the bleeding problem, corpses, etc. They did not make Him unclean. Instead, He made them clean. He healed them. This should have been a big clue to the Jewish people of His identity.¹⁰ Haggai is saying that the people need to press forward in obedience and not shirk their responsibility to complete the temple.

In 2:15-17, Haggai continues his sermon with these words: **“But now, do consider from this day onward: before one stone was placed on another¹¹ in the temple of the LORD, from that time when one came to a grain heap of twenty measures, there would be only ten; and when one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there would be only twenty. I smote you and every work of your hands with blasting wind, mildew and hail; yet you did not come back to Me,’ declares the LORD.”** Only on the last day accounted for in this brief book did Haggai get back to the subject of harvests. He said that God wanted His people to “consider” again, this time to the dramatic difference they would see in their harvests since they had put God first.¹² On two separate occasions in these five verses, Haggai tells the people to “consider” (2:15, 19). He takes them back to the place of their disobedience and reminds them of what the Lord did to them. That way, if they get any visions of grandeur, they will hopefully stop and “consider.”

In these verses God reminds them of how things were before they began to rebuild the temple. They were going broke—economically and spiritually. Every time they made \$100, half of it disappeared. They invested \$1000 in a sure thing and within a week they had lost \$600. Everything they touched turned sour. Nothing worked right. The entire nation was in an economic decline—all because they had disobeyed God. Yet, God’s heart was just that His people would turn back to Him. We often misunderstand that God disciplines in order to restore, not to punish. He wants renewed fellowship with us.

This past week, a young couple in our church came into our office and paid back seven weeks of their tithe. I talked to this young couple on the phone and they told me that after listening to Haggai 1, they realized that the Lord was trying to get their attention spiritually and financially so they returned to the Lord what was His. This blew me away! Instead of picking up where they left off, they went back and corrected their past negligence. I assured this couple that God would honor their decision to put Him first.

Haggai’s third sermon concludes in 2:18-19: **“Do consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month; from the day when the temple of the LORD was founded, consider: Is the seed still in the barn? Even including the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree, it has not borne fruit. Yet from this day on I will bless you.”**¹³ Notice that the same phrase is repeated twice: “From this day onward.” It’s as if God is saying, “The past is the past and we can’t change that. But things are going to be different from now on.” Eventually, God will pour out His blessings.¹⁴

All gardeners understand this principle. You don’t plant today and harvest tomorrow. It takes a few weeks for the plant to poke its way through the soil, and even more weeks and months for the fruit to ripen for harvest. Historically, it took the Jews four years to finish rebuilding the temple. No doubt they faced continued opposition and discouragement all the way along. But by starting to rebuild they were planting fresh seed in the ground. It hadn’t come up yet, but God is saying, “Don’t worry. You’re going to reap an abundant harvest eventually. Just be faithful and I promise the harvest will come in.”

This is important for Christian workers to remember. Sometimes we grow weary in the service of the Lord and wonder if our efforts are in vain. God says, “You plant the seed and let me take care of the harvest.” The apostle Paul says, “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary” (Gal 6:9).

The last four verses of Haggai are written to David’s descendant, Zerubbabel, but the message is clearly prophetic and refers back to 2:6-7.

3. Prepare for your reward (2:20-23). In 2:20-23, Haggai writes, **“Then the word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying, ‘Speak to Zerubbabel governor of Judah, saying, ‘I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the power of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down, everyone by the sword of another. On that day,’ declares the LORD of hosts, ‘I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant,’¹⁵ declares the LORD, ‘and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you,’ declares the LORD of hosts.”** I find it fascinating that God’s final message is not to the people in general but to their leader—Zerubbabel. What a reminder to us that “everything rises or falls on leadership.” This is true in the home, your small business, and the church. Leadership makes the difference in every arena of life. If you are a leader, God expects you to step up and fulfill His calling on your life. He wants you to perform His work in all that you do, wherever you are. Often we think that God can’t use us where we are, but that is exactly the place He is at work.

Our text—and the short book of Haggai—closes with some very comforting words. Listen to God’s final message in 2:22-23: These verses prophetically speak of the future. Haggai records the words “on *that* day” not “on this day” (2:22). He then uses the repetition of the formula “declares the LORD [of hosts]” in 2:22-23 to emphasize the solemn and divine nature of the promise. Moreover, there is the repetition of the pronoun “I.” The Lord declares, “I will take you...” “I will make you...” and “I have chosen you...” The future rests in the capable and sovereign hands of the Lord of hosts (i.e., the Lord of the armies of heaven and earth).

Most of us aren’t familiar with the concept of a signet ring. Perhaps the closest contemporary analogy would be an identification badge that allows you access to highly classified information. When an ancient king wanted to affix his seal to a document he would take his signet ring and impress it into soft wax, which would then harden into an unbreakable seal. Thus, a signet ring was much more than a decorative ring. A signet ring was used to guarantee the authority and authenticity of a letter. It served as a signature when impressed in soft wax on a written document. God was reaffirming and guaranteeing His promise of a Messiah through David’s line. Zerubbabel was honored by a place in both genealogies of the Messiah. He became a key link in the chain of ancestry between David and the Messiah.

Now there’s an additional fact about this you may not realize. Zerubbabel had a grandfather named Jeconiah (also called Jehoiachin) who, many years earlier, had been one of the last kings of Judah before the Babylonian exile. He was a wicked king who did not serve the Lord. In Jeremiah 22 God pronounced a curse upon Jeconiah, in which He said, “‘As I live,’ declares the LORD, ‘even though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were a signet ring on My right hand, yet I would pull you off’” (Jer 22:24). Then He sentenced Jeconiah to deportation in Babylon, never to return to Israel. Finally, He uttered these words: “Write this man down childless, a man who will not prosper in his days; for no man of his descendants will prosper sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah” (Jer 22:30). Jeconiah is being told that not only will he be punished, but all his descendants will be punished as well and none of them will ever sit on the throne of David. But now God says to his grandson Zerubbabel, “I will make you like a signet ring.” Here we see the grace of God at work. Because of Zerubbabel’s faithfulness, the curse on his family has been lifted. The signet ring is back on God’s finger.

Zerubbabel himself never sat on the throne of David. But one of his descendants did. Matthew 1:12 mentions the name of Zerubbabel in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Zerubbabel never made it to the throne but his great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandson did (Luke 1:32-33). Five hundred years later, a baby was born in Bethlehem who was the lineal descendant of Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was honored in both genealogies as a key link to God’s signet ring. God was reaffirming His promise of a Messiah through David’s line. Thus, the book ends with a stirring word of encouragement to a discouraged leader. It was God’s way of saying, “Don’t give up. Don’t ever give up. You have no idea how great my plans are for you.” *The remedy for discouragement is to see God’s perspective.*

The book of Haggai is a book that can change your life. In May of 1991, an 18-year-old young woman heard the book of Haggai preached by Professor Ray Lubeck on her last day of Bible college. She was wrestling with whether or not to return to school the next year. She felt like maybe she should return to her hometown and work or go on a mission with YWAM. Yet, when she heard Haggai’s call to invest her life in knowing God’s Word and making disciples, she determined that she would return for her second year of Bible college. When Lori Griffin returned to Multnomah Bible College, I asked her to marry me. And as they say, “the rest is history.” If it wasn’t for Haggai’s preaching, Lori and I would not be married, we would not be at Emmanuel, and my three children would have never been born. The book of Haggai has certainly changed my life. I hope it has changed yours as well.

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Scripture Reading

Haggai 2:1-23

Psalm 2

Psalm 77:16-18

Psalm 110

Isaiah 60:4-14

Zechariah 14:9-15

Hebrews 12:26-27

Study Questions

1. Many Christians are wrapped up with “what was,” instead of “what is” and “what will be.” When have I caught myself longingly looking back on the past, that no longer exists? Does this help me or hurt me? How have I been guilty of comparing my life, work, and ministry with that of others?
2. Why are so many American Christians burning out? Are we too emotionally fragile, or are there other causes? What discourages me most in my service for the Lord? How can I prevent and overcome it? What role should the Lord play in helping me when I go through discouraging seasons? Is there another believer who I am in community with who can help me when I encounter discouragement? If not, will I pray that the Lord will supply me with such a brother or sister? Will I also make a commitment to be a constant encourager to those who need me?
3. What ministry am I presently involved in? How has this ministry helped me to take my eyes off of my own discouragement? Am I balanced in my various roles and responsibilities? How can I know if I am too committed to the Lord’s work? Where is the proper balance between work, home, and church commitments? Who do I know who balances his or her demands?
4. What is a biblical definition of “success” in Christian service? How do I know if my ministry is honoring God? Will there always be outward signs of God’s blessing? Are all problems (health, financial, relational, etc.) a part of God’s discipline? If we are seeking to live in obedience, will we be problem-free? Why or why not?

Notes

¹ The temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. Haggai prophesied in 520 B.C.—66 years later. It is possible that Haggai himself was a young boy when the temple was destroyed. Certainly there must have been many people over 75 who remembered the splendor of Solomon's temple and mourned for what they had lost.

² Preaching Today Citation: Robert Russell, "Releasing Resentment," Preaching Today, Tape No. 136.

³ Steven J. Cole, "God's Encouragement for Discouraged Servants" (Haggai 2:1-9): <http://www.fcfoonline.org/content/1/sermons/022303M.pdf>.

⁴ The same Hebrew word *shamayim* may be translated "sky" or "heavens" depending on the context. Although many English versions translate the term as "heavens," here, the other three elements present in this context (earth, sea, dry ground) suggest "sky" is in view. See NET Study Notes.

⁵ This refers to the final judgment when God will destroy the heavens and the earth, prior to establishing a new heavens and earth (2 Pet 3:10, 12-13; Rev 20:11; 21:1).

⁶ In the Hebrew text, the verb "will come" is plural, while "desired" is singular; so some interpreters translate "desired" as a compound noun: "the desirable things of the nations," that is, their treasures. The remnant had no beautiful treasures with which to adorn their temple, but when Messiah comes to reign, the treasures of the nations will be brought to Him and will be used for His glory.

⁷ The NIV has left the question open by not capitalizing the word "desired" and by not rendering the word as a plural noun.

⁸ The translation "desire of all nations" in Haggai 2:7 has taken such deep root, through its use in sermons, Christmas hymns and a long history of Jewish and Christian commentary, that it is difficult to handle this text objectively. The King James rendering, "The Desire of all nations shall come," has been challenged by almost every modern translation in English. The 1901 ASV changed "desire" to "precious things," while the NASB now reads, "They will come with the wealth of all nations." The NEB has "The treasure of all nations shall come hither," and the NAB uses the word "treasures." Clearly, the trend is away from giving the word *desire* a messianic connotation, favoring instead the impersonal idea of "valuables" or "desired things." All the controversy stems from the use of the singular feminine noun *desire* with a plural verb, *[they] come*. As soon as this is pointed out, modern commentators drop any further search or references to a person and assume that the noun must be plural in meaning. Actually, both the singular and plural forms of this Hebrew noun, *chemdah* are used in the Old Testament to refer to persons. Saul was described as being "the desire of Israel" in 1 Samuel 9:20. Likewise Daniel 11:37 speaks of "the one desired by women." The plural form of the same word appears three times to refer to Daniel himself in Daniel 9:23 and 10:11, 19. In these cases, the word is usually translated as "highly esteemed" and a "man of high esteem" (*chamudah*). This same word is also used to describe valuable possessions, especially silver and gold. In this construction the emphasis usually falls on the preciousness of the items. Did Haggai intend to talk about the valuables that the Gentiles would bring, or did he intend to refer to the Messiah himself, as most of the ancient commentaries and the Vulgate had it? Those opting for a reference to precious gifts believe this rendering makes contextual sense. The precious gifts would compensate for the temple's lack of adornment. Accordingly, the Gentiles would come laden down with gifts for the temple out of homage to the Lord of the earth, a foretaste of the good things to come in the New Covenant. This interpretation is said to square with the plural verb and the feminine singular subject. However, the earliest Jewish interpretation and the majority of early Christian interpreters referred this passage to the Messiah. Since the word *desire* is used to refer to a person in several key passages, and since there is a longing of all the nations for a deliverer, acknowledged or not, it seems fair to understand this passage as a reference to the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrew often places the concrete word for an abstract noun. Nor should we be thrown off balance by the presence of a plural verb, for often when one verb is controlled by two nouns, the verb agrees with the second noun even if the verb actually belongs with the former. Although some are reluctant to adopt a messianic interpretation, the word *desire* can be treated as an accusative—a construction which is frequently adopted with verbs of motion: "And they will come to the desire of all nations [namely, Christ]." This rendering avoids the problem of the plural verb *come*, as was first suggested by Cocceius. In accordance with a messianic interpretation, just as the first temple was filled with the glory of God, so this temple will yet be filled with the divine glory in Christ (Jn 1:14), a glory which shall be revealed at his Second Coming (Mal 3:1). See Walter C. Kaiser, *Micah-Malachi: The Communicator's Commentary* (Dallas: Word, 1992), 267-268; Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, [1997, c1996], Electronic ed. See also Herbert Wolf, "The Desire of All Nations in Haggai 2:7: Messianic or Not?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 19 (1976): 97-102 and Donald A. Leggett, *Loving God and Disturbing Men* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 141-142.

⁹ This is probably not an appeal to the Torah (i.e., the Pentateuch) as such but to a priestly ruling. There is, however, a Mosaic law that provides the basis for the priestly ruling (Lev 6:27).

¹⁰ Hampton Keathley IV, “Haggai”: http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=977.

¹¹ *Before one stone was laid on another in the LORD's temple* is best taken as referring to the laying of the present temple's foundation, sixteen years earlier (536 B.C.; see Ezra 3:8). Cf. NCV “before you started laying stones”; TEV “before you started to rebuild”; NLT “before you began to lay (started laying CEV) the foundation.” See NET Study Notes.

¹² Three prophets especially related economic prosperity to spiritual obedience: Joel, Haggai, and Malachi. This is true as a general principle of cause and effect (Prov 11:24) but it is especially related to the Mosaic Covenant of blessing for obedience (Deut 28).

¹³ God owns everything (see Lev 25:23; Deut 10:14; 1 Chron 29:11-12; Job 41:11; Ps 24:1-2; 50:11-12; 1 Cor 6:19-20).

¹⁴ This oracle explained why agricultural blessing had not begun immediately after the people resumed reconstruction on the temple. Their present dedication and obedience did not wipe out their previous covenant unfaithfulness and its punishments. That punishment had to run its course, but now, as of the day of this prophecy, God would begin to bless the people with better harvests. God will bless His people for their obedience, but sometimes He will not erase the punishment that previous sins have made necessary. Sin always brings death (Rom 6:23). Sometimes that punishment must run its course before blessing can begin. Dr. Thomas L. Constable, “Notes of Haggai” (<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/haggai.pdf>, 2007), 15.

¹⁵ The title “my servant” is often messianic in the OT (cf. 1 Sam 3:18; 1 Kgs 11:34; Isa 41:8; 42:1-9; 44:4; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12; Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24-25). Zechariah, Haggai's contemporary, used another messianic title to refer to Zerubbabel: the branch (Zech 3:8; 6:12; cf. Isa 11:1; Jer 23:5-6; 33:14-16).