

The Spirit of Prophecy Series:

Haggai

"Feast"



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“He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27).

“He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day’” (Luke 24:44-46).

“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days, he has spoken to us in his Son” (Hebrews. 1:1, 2).

“For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:17-19).

The Spirit of Prophecy

Introduction

Prophecy...

As the word hangs there in the ether, what comes to mind? A hairy man in burlap, pointing his finger and shouting? A one world government? The end of the world? For many of us, the only thing we definitely associate with prophecy is a big question mark. Yet, as the scriptures on the preceding page show, the New Testament contains some clear statements about prophecy. Jesus taught that all scripture, prophecy included, found its fulfillment in Himself. While every prophecy has an historical fulfillment relating to the circumstances in which it is given, its full meaning is only realized in the person and work of Christ. This holds true even of prophecies whose fulfillment we still await.

The “end times” seem to be a continual source of curiosity, intrigue, and confusion among Christians. Mountains of books—fiction and non-fiction—have been written on the subject. Movies have been made and remade. Every teacher worth his salt has weighed in. Theologians and fanatics alike have fastidiously woven scripture and world events into timelines. What has been lost in all of this is Jesus. Many have searched the prophets more diligently for the antichrist than for Christ, though the prophets themselves did not do this (1 Peter 1:10, 11). Wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, pestilence, and persecution are clues in a cosmic “who-dunnit” instead of being seen for what they are: signs of *His coming* (Matt. 24:3-14). When Christ ceases to be the center and interpretation of the end-times, it is little wonder that there is so much confusion about them among believers.

To put this in theological terms, the chief value of prophecy lies in its Christology, not its eschatology. Jesus said the law and the prophets all hang on two commandments: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37-40). “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:16). Prophecy has no purpose other than to draw us into Christ and to make us living sacrifices in His image (Rom. 12:1, 2). If our treatment of prophecy does not compel us to live for Jesus instead of ourselves, we may fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, but, not having love, will be nothing in the sight of God (2 Cor. 5:15; 1 Cor. 13:2).

The “Spirit of Prophecy” series is based on Revelation 19:10—“For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” The aim of this series is two fold: 1) To discover the testimony of Jesus in the words of the prophets; 2) By discovering the testimony of Jesus, to rescue the prophetic books from the carnal and even fantastical interpretations which they have sometimes been subjected. Restoring the testimony of Jesus to the prophets also allows prophetic voices to fulfill their original ministry. God spoke through prophets to deal with the hearts of His people, to heal their unfaithfulness, to draw them back to Himself so that they might worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). This ministry is largely lost when prophecy is treated as a way to decode current events. Only by lifting up Jesus will men be drawn to God (John 12:32, 33).

This is not to say that the interpretations offered here are the only ones possible. Hopefully, the ways of seeing Jesus in the prophets are as endless as God Himself. But if this series can cause the reader to think differently about the prophets, to search them for Jesus instead of end-times timelines, then it will have accomplished its purpose.

Haggai

“Feast”

God sent Haggai to the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem after being captives in Babylon. These ventured to rebuild the temple which the Babylonians had razed and burned (2 Kings 25:9). But the rebuilding came to a standstill. Political wrangling and the opposition of enemies were the main obstacles (Ezra 4). But the Lord sent Haggai to address another issue, one in the hearts of His people: they became satisfied with the progress that had already been made in the Lord’s work and began to focus on building their own homes and lives. In a sense, this is what they were used to. While they were in Babylon, Jeremiah had prophesied, “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce” (Jer. 29:5). But the Lord wanted to transform their thinking. They still thought and lived like captives even though they were out of Babylon. Pointedly, the Lord asked through Haggai, “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while [my] house remains a ruin?” (Hag. 1:4).

The Lord then detailed how they planted much but harvested little, ate a lot but were never satisfied, and earned wealth only to have it trickle away. The irony! Here they were, making a point of bettering themselves, and God’s people were worse off than ever. “‘Why?’” declares the LORD Almighty. ‘Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house’” (Hag. 1:9).

As Christians, we are no longer captives. We belong to the Jerusalem above who is free (Gal. 4:26). Be that as it may, we often bring our captive thinking with us: each of us is busy with his or her own life. Instead of seeking first the kingdom of God and trusting Him to give all other things to us, we seek first all other things and wonder where the kingdom is (Matt. 6:33). We expect our lives to be more satisfying because we put so much time and energy into them. But the return is usually disappointing (Hag. 1:9, 10).

The name Haggai means “feast.” There is a feast to be had, but it does not lie in pursuing our interests, achieving what we want, and providing a comfortable existence for ourselves. “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work” (John 4:34). To do the Father’s will meant a lifestyle of saying, “Not my will” (Luke 22:42). To finish His work meant dying on the cross (John 19:30). To the mind still in captivity, such a life sounds like utter famine. It is incomprehensible that real satisfaction could be found in giving up the things that seem to be the source of it. But this is the secret of life that we must know. “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his soul?” (Luke 9:24, 25).

Go Up!

The Lord’s aim in sending Haggai was not merely to criticize His people but to lead them in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake (Psalm 23:3). To that end, He instructed them: “Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored” (Hag. 1:8). To end the famine of self-interest, the people needed to put the honor of the Lord and of His house first.

We too must “go up” and fellowship with God. “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.... For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:1, 3). If Christians want to find the fullness of life Jesus promised, we must put aside our “houses,” our wills, our purposes, and come to the feast above—the communion table of Christ. As we sit with Him, He will

transform our captive thinking by renewing our minds, and we will no longer conform to the pattern of this world (Rom. 12:2). Instead, we will give ourselves up because we are eating, and drinking, and internalizing the Person who gave Himself for the life of the world (John 6:51-53).

As the Lord gives Himself in us, we participate in His ministry to His bride: “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27). We do not go up for ourselves, for our own spiritual development. We go up so that we can give ourselves up to build the Lord’s house. Many of us who are dissatisfied with our own lives also complain that the church isn’t meeting our needs. Instead of viewing the body as those whom we are called to build up through personal sacrifice, we view it as one more vendor of personal satisfaction. We bring all our self-centered, captivity thinking with us, then blame the church when our expectations aren’t met. But if we are not giving ourselves to make the church a vibrant, living body where Christ is pleased and honored, who will? Shall we blame church leadership for our mediocre church experience? Is it the job of leadership to supply a product that meets the demands of a congregation of consumers? No, if church is not what we think it should be, we have no one to blame but ourselves.

Paul certainly didn’t view church as a place to get: “When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church” (1 Cor. 14:26). This is the fulfillment of Haggai’s prophecy: a gathering of people who have all gone up and have brought back materials with which to build the Lord’s house. Only in such a house as this—where life is truly flowing from the head and between the members—will the Lord take pleasure and be honored.

The Church of Babylon

Yet we must be clear that staying busy at church—constructing new buildings, developing ministries, growing our congregations—is not necessarily the same as building the Lord’s house. When believers have a captivity mindset, they approach church like Babylonians. Babylonian Christians are sincere in their zeal to do something for God. To be sure, their ministries often tower over others, and they seem to reach heaven with great effectiveness (Gen. 11:4). But these have not gone up, and their zeal is not according to knowledge (Prov. 19:2; Rom. 10:2). They may be born again and even spirit-filled. But they have not sat with Jesus, communing face to face at His table; they have not brought down materials from above. Instead, they begin in the earth and build with natural resources: perhaps a leader’s charisma, worldly marketing strategies, the promise of financial blessing, activities that draw crowds, or the uncrucified talents of church members. In the Babylonian paradigm, the church is the servant of self-interest. Not only are people busy with their own lives, the church teaches them to be, and designs its ministries to enhance living for self. At the end of the day, no matter how much the name of Jesus is claimed, the bottom line for the Babylonian Church is “that we may make a name for ourselves” (Gen. 11:4).

Paul had something to say about those who build on the foundation of Christ using inferior materials:

If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is.... Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple” (1 Cor. 3:11-17).

However good our intentions are, we destroy the church when we build with materials that are inferior to those of the foundation. Jesus laid the foundation of the church at the cost of His own life. Can we build the church for less than our lives? Before we build, we must consider the price: “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:28-33).

To be sure, ways other than the cross will present themselves and tempt us as we pursue God’s work. But consider: What if Jesus had turned stones to bread, or thrown Himself from the temple, or worshiped Satan to gain His kingdom (Matt. 4:8, 9)? What if He had listened to the voices of those who said, “Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” (Matt. 27:40). He may have impressed people with such a display of supernatural power. He would have won a lot of followers from that crowd of mockers. But He would have won them to Himself instead of His Father. He would have built a palace for Himself while the Lord’s house remained a ruin.

A Greater Glory

Thankfully, the people of God responded to Haggai’s message. They turned from building up their own houses and began to build the house of the Lord (Hag. 1:12). Because of this, the Lord also responded to them: Darius, the pagan emperor, decreed that the costs of rebuilding be paid for out of the royal treasury (Ezra 6:4, 8). By giving up what they had, the Lord’s people received more than they could ever need.

In the same way, when we turn from our own lives and resources, the King of Kings pours out His life and resources:

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age...and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10: 29, 30).

God isn’t mean or controlling, as if He refuses to help unless He gets His way. It is simply a fact that if a branch lives independently from its vine, it also lives independently from roots, nutrients, water, and everything else that is necessary for bearing fruit (John 15: 4). But if we give up our independence, living in union with the True Vine and with other branches, we will bear much fruit to the Father’s glory (John 15:5-8).

Even though King Darius agreed to pay for the rebuilding, many who remembered the first temple wept as construction began. To these, the new temple seemed like nothing in comparison to the old (Ezra 3:12; Hag. 2:3). But God is not concerned with a beautiful exterior. He is concerned with inward glory (Matt. 23:25). Through Haggai, He drew the attention of His people to glory with an awesome oath: “The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house” (Hag. 2:9).

Building with the King’s resources doesn’t necessarily translate into a work that is outwardly glorious or impressive to the eye. The Lord’s house may not draw crowds or have a dazzling sanctuary. His house certainly won’t be sought out by those seeking to emulate a successful church-growth strategy. But if we go up and feast on things above, we will have something greater than human approval or towers reaching heaven. We will come down out of heaven, shining with the glory of God. And God Himself will announce us as “the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:9-11).

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The word is not just knowledge about God. Rather, as John 1:1 says, “the Word was God.” It is hoped that the reader will not just receive knowledge or teaching about God but God Himself. “This is eternal life, that they may know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”

(John 17:3).

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