

# Haggai: Old Testament New European Christadelphian Commentary

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## PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. Charities such as Carelinks Ministries and the Christadelphian Advancement Trust endeavour to provide totally free copies worldwide according to resources and donations available to them. But there is a desire by many to go beyond those brief comments on each chapter, and delve deeper into the text. The New European Christadelphian commentary seeks to meet that need. As with all Divine things, beauty becomes the more

apparent the closer we analyze. We can zoom in the scale of investigation to literally every letter of the words used by His Spirit. But that would require endless volumes. And academic analysis is no more nor less than that; we are to live by His word. This commentary seeks to achieve a balance between practical teaching on one hand, and a reasonable level of thorough consideration of the original text. On that side of things, you will observe in the commentary a common abbreviation: “s.w.”. This stands for “same word”; the same original Greek or Hebrew word translated [A] is used when translated [B]. This helps to slightly remove the mask of translation through which most Bible readers have to relate to the original text.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But finally- don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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# Haggai Chapter 1

Haggai 1:1 *In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month-* The many restoration prophecies had stated that the Jews would return from Babylon after Babylon had fallen and restore God's Kingdom in Judah under a Messianic ruler. Ez. 40-48 contains commands more than predictions of how a temple system would be rebuilt, with a "Prince" who was also a priest as the Messianic leader. They would repent and enter a new covenant which would replace the old covenant. Tragically, most of the Jews preferred the soft life of Babylon, and those who did return were impenitent and are revealed by Haggai, Malachi, Ezra and Nehemiah as seeking their own personal gain from emigration to Judah. And so the prophecies were rescheduled and reapplied. There is an element to which they will come literally true in the last days when latter day Babylon falls, a remnant of Judah repent, and the Lord Jesus returns to earth to re-establish God's Kingdom on earth based in Israel. But they are also reinterpreted in many New Testament passages which allude to the restoration prophecies, being reapplied to Christian believers entering the new covenant and coming out of 'Babylon' in a more spiritual sense.

Some exiles did return and began rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. But they were several times interrupted by seemingly invincible opposition from the local peoples and

the king of Persia. But through the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, the exiles were encouraged to keep on keeping on, and against all odds, a temple was rebuilt (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). So we should not read Haggai and Zechariah as merely droning on against the Jews and not getting very far. It was due to their inspired words that the discouraged, spiritually weak people of God were inspired to rise up and do the work of God's Kingdom, and succeed with every man's hand against them. In this is their abiding value to us. There is however the repeated theme of wasted potential- so much could have happened at that time, even the re-establishment of God's Kingdom in the form of the kingdom of Israel, replete with a Messianic ruler. But it didn't, because of short termist, self-satisficing attitudes, a failure to look beyond the immediate and personal to a far bigger picture.

*The Word of Yahweh came by Haggai the prophet-* Literally, 'by / in the hand of', a classic statement of Biblical inspiration.

*To Zerubbabel-* Haggai is addressed specifically to two men, Zerubbabel and Joshua ['Jesus'], who could have been the Messianic rulers at the time of the restoration. They both let the baton drop. It's a sad story of not using huge potential which is there in God's plan for men. He is also called Sheshbazzar in Ezra 1:8; 5:14, 16; Sheshbazzar was probably his Chaldean name; just as Daniel was called Belteshazzar.

Is. 53:2 speaks of Messiah, in a restoration context beginning in Is. 52, as ‘growing up’, the same word used to describe the ‘coming up’ from the dry ground of Babylon. This potential Messiah was Zerubbabel, but one wonders whether when he failed to fulfil the prophecies, there was the possibility that another man could have fulfilled his role. Nehemiah ‘came up’ from Babylon, and was “the servant” who ‘prospered’ Yahweh’s work (Neh. 1:11; 2:20), just as the servant prophecies required (Is. 53:10; 48:15); and he was thereby the redeemer of his brethren (Neh. 5:8). He encouraged the singing of praise on the walls of Zion (Neh. 9:5; 12:46), surely in a conscious effort to fulfil the words of Is. 60:18- that Zion’s gates in Messiah’s Kingdom would be praise. He was “despised” as Messiah would be (Neh. 2:19; Is. 53:3 s.w.). He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, as Messiah would (Neh. 2:12 cp. Zech. 9:9); and Neh. 2:16 sounds very much like “of the people there was none with me” (Is. 63:3). The Gentiles round about came to sit at Nehemiah’s table to eat and drink (Neh. 5:17), just as Isaiah had prophesied could happen on a grander scale at the restoration of the Kingdom. One wonders if the potential fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies was transferred to him? And yet Nehemiah returned to Babylon at least once, and there is no record that on his second visit he stayed on, but rather, the implication seems to be, he returned again to the service of Babylon. The total lack of Biblical information about his

later life may reflect this disappointing decision. This train of thought enables us to appreciate the joy and pleasure which the Father had when finally His beloved Son lived up to all that He sought and expected.

And yet according to Jewish tradition, Nehemiah's real name was Zerubbabel, the branch (*Sanhedrin* 38a)- perhaps the same Zerubbabel as mentioned in Haggai and Zechariah. The Hippolytus Chronicle 7:3:37 even claims Nehemiah was a direct descendant of David and in the direct kingly line. His name, 'comfort of Yahweh', invites us to see him as the potential fulfilment of the Is. 40:1,2 prophecy about a Messiah figure arising to the exiles, giving them God's comfort. At the time of Judah's redemption, while the temple had been trodden down by her enemies, the promised Messiah figure of Is. 63:1-3,18 was to come from Edom and Bozrah - both code names for Babylon. The words "Bozrah" and "Babylon" have similar root meanings ('high / fortified place'). And he was to lament how the people of Judah were not with him- "of the people there was none with me". But this is the very spirit of Nehemiah, when he returns to Jerusalem from Babylon and looks around the 'trodden down' city at night, not telling the people of the Jews about his inspection- i.e. the people were not with him (Neh. 2:11-16).

*Son of Shealtiel*- The Salathiel of Mt. 1:12; Lk. 3:27. He was directly in the Messianic line and could have therefore legitimately been the king of Judah. His father is called Pedaiah in 1 Chron. 3:17,19- presumably he was adopted by



his uncle Salathiel on the death of his father.

*Governor of Judah-* Sheshbazzar / Zerubbabel was the one given the temple vessels, appointed "governor" of Judah and who laid the foundation of the temple (Ezra 5:14-16).

*And to Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying-* The Divine intention was that Zerubbabel was to be the king in the line of David, and Joshua ['Jesus'] the high priest.

Haggai 1:2 *This is what Yahweh of Armies says: These people say, 'The time hasn't yet come, the time for Yahweh's house to be built'* - They reasoned that "the time" of which Jeremiah spoke hadn't come- even though the temple had miraculously been enabled to be rebuilt, for no human benefit at all to Cyrus (Isaiah 45:13 "not for price nor reward"). They felt that all the prophecies were "marvellous" in the sense of something incapable of concrete fulfilment in their experience (Zechariah 8:6). This is why they are rebuked them for saying "the time is not come...that the Lord's house should be built". They didn't want the prophecy to be fulfilled, because it would mean 'going up' from their ceiled houses- both in Babylon and in the farmsteads they had built in Judah- to build the temple.

The context of this, according to Ezra 5:1, was of the people losing heart in the rebuilding because of the opposition from the Samaritans and the temporary ban on the work from

Babylon. They argued: 'We'll do God's work if we get the chance, but this ban is clearly a sign from God not to go ahead'- when really it was their self-satisfaction with their "ceiled houses" (:4) that made them give up so easily. But the Angels were eager to go ahead! The paltry excuses for shirking the Lord's work today are no better. As ever, they stem from the apathy born of materialism, but are wrapped up in pseudo-spiritual reasoning.

The exiles asked for 'deliverance'- but they redefined 'deliverance' as meaning being allowed to live prosperously in the land of their captivity (Baruch 1:12 cp. 2:14), rather than being delivered from Babylon and returning to Judah. In a way, the book of Esther shows how God heard this prayer. But the book of Esther therefore has a sad ending, with the Jews prosperous, loved and respected, and even further away from returning to the land. Indeed, Baruch 2:21 records them misquoting Jer. 27:12 about the need to obey the King of Babylon during their captivity, and understanding this as meaning they were to remain in Babylon! Baruch 6:2 is perhaps the most serious example of misquoting and wilfully misunderstanding God's word. Here, Baruch [as Jeremiah's scribe] changes the prophecy of Jer. 29:10, that Israel were to be 70 years in Babylon and then return: "When you reach Babylon you will be there many years, a period seven generations long, after which I will bring you back". The 70 years are turned into seven generations. This was precisely the mindset spoken against in Haggai 1:2, whereby the Jews

reasoned that the time had not yet come to rebuild the temple. "The time" referred to the time spoken of by Jeremiah- but Baruch had re-interpreted the 70 years as meaning seven generations. And yet all this was done with a surface-level reverence for God's word- the exiles considered themselves blessed because they had God's law (Baruch 4:4). Indeed, much of Baruch is a condemnation of idols and a demand to worship Yahweh.

Haggai 1:3 *Then the Word of Yahweh came by Haggai the prophet, saying-* We may at times wonder whether anything, even God's word, has the power to shift human complacency. But at least some responded to Haggai: "the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet" (Ezra 6:14). Haggai was addressed specifically to Zerubbabel and Joshua, the elders; and initially they did respond.

Haggai 1:4 *Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies waste?*- As explained on :1, this prophecy was addressed specifically to Zerubbabel and Joshua, the elders. We can conclude that they particular were living in luxurious houses, focused upon their house rather than God's. And that is an abiding challenge to us all, especially noting that the Hebrew idea of "house"

refers to a family as well as a building.

Is. 60:7 prophesied that God would “*glorify the house of my glory*”. But this was in fact a conditional prophecy, capable of fulfilment through the freewill efforts of the returning exiles. For they were empowered by Artaxerxes “to *beautify* [s.w. “glorify”] the house of the Lord” (Ezra 7:27). All their efforts to glorify / beautify the house, therefore, would have had God’s special and powerful blessing behind them. But was the house ultimately glorified? No- for Israel would not. They got sidetracked by beautifying their own homes, building “*cieled houses*” for themselves (Hag. 1:4 AV). The word for “*cieled*” or “*paneled*” occurs in 1 Kings 6:9; 7:3,7 to describe the roofing of the first temple- which they were to be rebuilding, rather than building their own houses. The glory would have entered the house of God’s glory as it did at the inauguration of the first temple (2 Chron. 7:1-3). Ezekiel prophesied that ultimately the glory would fill the temple as it had done then (Ez. 43:4,5). But God’s prophesy of this in Is. 60:7, that He would glorify His house, meant that He was prepared to work through men to glorify it. The fulfilment of Ezekiel’s vision of the cloud of glory entering the temple again could have been fulfilled if the exiles had done what Artaxerxes empowered them to do- to glorify the house of glory. And so the fulfilment was delayed. The glory of the temple the exiles built was tragically less than the glory of the first temple; and so it would only be in the last day of Messiah’s second coming that the house shall truly be

filled with glory (Hag. 2:3,7,9). And the lesson ought to be clear for us, in the various projects and callings of our lives: it becomes crucial for us to discern God's specific purposes for us, and insofar as we follow His leading, we will feel a blessing and power which is clearly Divine.

Haggai 1:5 *Now therefore this is what Yahweh of Armies says: Consider your ways-* "Consider" is a key word in Haggai (s.w. :7; 2:15,18). To 'set our heart upon' (Heb.) our "ways" is difficult- self-examination doesn't come easy to any of us. Ultimately the exiles didn't go in God's ways, their "thoughts" and "ways" of thinking were not God's- when they should and could have been (Is. 55:8,9; the later chapters of Isaiah are a lament that the returned exiles would not go in God's way). The root cause for the failure was right in the heart- they were not spiritually minded, God's passion for His Kingdom was not theirs. The spiritual intention of the exile had been that Judah would consider their "ways" (Ez. 20:43,44; 36:31). They hadn't done this, and therefore those who returned did so from motives of personal improvement rather than spiritual desire for the things of the Kingdom- as :6 now laments.

Haggai 1:6 *You have sown much, and bring in little. You eat, but you don't have enough. You drink, but you aren't filled*

*with drink. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm, and he who earns wages earns wages to put them into a bag with holes in it-*

In the context of the restoration from Babylon, Ezekiel and Zech. 8:12 prophesied: “For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things”. But we know that in reality, Judah were not obedient to the heavenly vision of Ezekiel, and therefore Judah’s agriculture was *not* blessed in this way; the vines cast their fruit, and the fruit of the ground was destroyed (Hag. 1:6,11; Mal. 3:10,11). The reason was that Zech. 8:12 was conditional-upon Zech. 8:16,17: “These are the things that ye shall do [i.e. to bring these prophecies about]; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD”. But Judah abused each other, and didn’t fulfil the conditions for the prophecy.

They were gathered back [although they resisted this in that many preferred to stay in the soft life of Babylon], but they hardly dwelt safely or confidently in their land as the prophecies of the restoration had foreseen. They planted vineyards, but received a poor harvest due to their lack of attention to God’s house; their enemies destroyed their fruits,

and their vine “cast her fruit before the time” (Hag. 1:6; Mal. 3:10,11). Haggai and Malachi criticized Israel for this, saying it could be rectified by their obedience: “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Mal. 3:10). Yet in Nehemiah’s time, Judah refused to pay tithes properly; but even then, if they had thoroughly repented, the Kingdom conditions were still possible. Such was God’s desire to continue working with His hopeless people.

Haggai 1:7 *This is what Yahweh of Armies says: Consider your ways-* See on :5. "Ways" can refer to literal roads. Judah were commanded to return from Babylon in Jer. 31:21: “Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities”. The same command to flee from the land of the north [Babylon] is to be found in Isaiah 48:20; Jer. 51:6; Zechariah 2:6; and they were to “get thee up to the high mountain” (Isaiah 40:9), using the same word about Judah ‘going up’ from Babylon to Israel. "A woman shall compass a man" (Jer. 31:22) suggests that the woman, Judah, were to take the initiative with God by mapping out the roads they would take back to Zion- the

suggestion could be that the 70 year period of captivity could have been shortened had Judah taken the initiative.

Haggai 1:8 *Go up to the mountain, bring wood, and build the house-* The majority of Judah remained in Babylon. And the majority of those who did return, only did so in order for purely personal benefit- of having their own house and land. They ‘went up’ to the land, but not to Zion. With reference to Isaiah 40:9 [“get thee up to the high mountain”] Haggai exhorted them: “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. *Go up to the mountain*, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much [i.e. they expected the promised Kingdom blessings], and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house”. Their focus was on their own lands and farms rather than the glory of Zion (as Nehemiah 13:10,11). They stood related to the things of God’s kingdom, but never ventured beyond their own personal self-interest. They would not accept that God manifestation rather than human salvation and pleasure was the essential purpose of their God.

Haggai's prophecy can be dated quite precisely- it was given August-September 520 BC. This was harvest time. And at this very labour intensive season, where all hands had to be



on deck out in the fields, the prophet called for a dedication of labour to building up God's house. Yet Judah were too concerned with their own harvests than the harvest of God's glory. They were asked to do something counter-instinctive- to take time out from harvest, and spend that time on building up God's house. And they failed the challenge. But it wasn't that they were simply lazy. Hag. 1:8, a prophecy given 18 years after the decree of Cyrus, orders the people to go up into the hills of Judah and get wood with which to build the temple. And yet according to Ezra 3:7, the decree of Cyrus 18 years earlier had resulted in cedar wood being brought from Tyre and Sidon, enough for the temple to be built. Where had the wood gone? Is the implication not that the leadership had used it for their own "cieled houses" (Hag. 1:4)? It all seems so petty minded. But this is what we are tempted to do, time and again- build up our own house and leave God's house desolate and in a very poor second place.

*I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, says Yahweh-* The idea of God 'accepting' or taking pleasure in Israel is found in Ez. 43:27; when the temple was built and the sacrifices offered, "I will accept you". If Judah resumed building the temple according to Ezekiel's plan, "I will take pleasure" in it, God offered. They should be more committed to building the temple "that I may appear in my glory" (RSV). The glory of Yahweh as described at the end of Ezekiel could have appeared in Haggai's time- but this wonderful possibility was held back by Israel's petty minded, self-

satisficing laziness. The same word is used in Ez. 43:27-*then*, when the temple of Ezekiel was built, Yahweh would “accept / take pleasure in” His people and temple. But because they built and served Him with such a mean spirit, He did not “accept” them at that time (Mal. 1:10,13 s.w.). Note how Hag. 1:8 describes the need to go up onto the mountain and build the temple- as if to recall attention to Ezekiel’s opening vision of the temple as built on a mountain. But Judah would not, and therefore the Kingdom blessings of corn, new wine and oil, as well as fruitfulness on the mountains, were all withheld (Hag. 1:11).

Haggai's criticism of the returnees is more understandable if we understand that most of them were the poor, who hadn't 'made it' in Babylon. It would be fair to infer that only the poor Jews returned from Babylon. The record in Ezra 2:64-70 speaks of 42,360 people returning, along with 7,337 servants and 200 singers, making a total of 49,837. And yet only 8,100 animals went with them to transport them. This means that many would have walked. They carried 5,400 vessels for use in the temple- so the picture could be that their more wealthy brethren laded them with goods, but only the poor returned. Further, the list of towns of origin in Ezra 2 suggests it was mainly those who had originally lived in peripheral villages who returned, rather than the inhabitants of Jerusalem and larger cities.

Haggai 1:9 *You looked for much, and, behold, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away-* The people expected "much" harvest, and were disappointed at the poor yields in Palestine. This would confirm the suggestion that many of those Jews who did return from Babylon were amongst the poor in Jewish exile society, and returned in home for personal betterment- rather than because they wished to obey the call of the prophets and establish God's glory in the land. That's a sober warning for all of us who may go through an external appearance of zeal for our God, whilst having very selfish and human motives underneath. Why, e.g., does a young woman so zealously attend church? Is it to worship God and build up His family... or because she perceives it as a potential meeting place with 'Mr. Right'? And so the examples could be multiplied.

*Why? says Yahweh of Armies, Because of My house that lies waste, while each of you is busy with his own house-* Haggai's words are full of implication that these men could have achieved so much, and yet chose not to rise up to their potentials. Hag. 1:9 takes on particular significance when read in this light: "My house lies desolate whilst you run about, each man [i.e. Zerubbabel and Joshua] to his own house. It was those two who preferred to dwell in their "cieled houses" whilst God's house lay desolate (Hag. 1:4). The reference to "cieled houses" would be only relevant to the upper classes- it would hardly be applicable to all the

returned exiles. If this line of interpretation is correct, then we can understand these two men as focusing more on their own homes than on God's house, and fulfilling the great potential possible if it had been built according to Ezekiel's specifications.

Haggai 1:10 *Therefore for your sake-* Perhaps specifically the selfishness of Zerubbabel and Joshua led to a drought which affected many. This is the problem with sin- it affects others, and we learn from the account of Adam and Eve.

*The skies withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit-* This is exactly the language of 1 Kings 8:35, which said that in such case, the people were to repent and pray towards the temple in Zion! But they didn't want to build that temple, they wanted rather to build up their own glory and homesteads. All things could've worked so wonderfully together for good; but they didn't want to participate in the program God had arranged, and so instead a downward spiral kicked in.

Haggai 1:11 *I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on that which the ground brings forth, on men, on livestock, and on all the labour of the hands-* These are all aspects of the promised Messianic Kingdom which could have come

about at the restoration (e.g. Joel 2:19,24; Jer. 31:12). The very same sequence of words occurs in Neh. 5:11; 10:37,39; 13:5- instead of giving those things to Yahweh, the Jews stole them from each other, and jibbed about paying them as tithes to Him. And thereby they precluded the possibility of Yahweh richly blessing all His people with those very same things in a Kingdom setting. As with all those who are rejected from God's purpose, they effectively rejected themselves from His Kingdom by their behaviour, rather than Him rejecting them Himself.

Haggai 1:12 *Then Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of Yahweh, their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as Yahweh, their God, had sent him; and the people feared Yahweh-* see on Jer. 23:18,22. This was a commendable humility, for it is hard for leaders to repent. It seems that they didn't maintain this level of intensity of repentance, but all the same, God responded positively to them at that time, in response to their repentance of that moment.

Even amongst those who returned to the land, only a minority wished to take their spiritual possibilities seriously. The returned exiles are called "this people" (Hag. 1:2; 2:14) or "the people of the land" (Hag. 2:4), but only "the remnant of the people" actually responded to the call of the prophets like Haggai who encouraged them in the work and vision of what

was possible.

Haggai 1:13 *Then Haggai, Yahweh's messenger-* An example of *malak* referring not only to supernatural beings ["Angels"] but to men; references to 'sinning Angels' must be understood as referring therefore to men and not heavenly beings. Haggai is presented as the mediator, taking the message of repentance to God, and Him sending Haggai back to the people with a message. The Messiah figure was to be accompanied by a messenger, "the messenger of the covenant" (Mal. 3:1); and Haggai could have been that to Zerubbabel, whilst he was willing to live up to the call to be the Messianic figure of that time. But he failed, and so the prophecies of the restoration with their Messianic figure and his messenger were reapplied to the Lord Jesus, who was heralded by John the Baptist as the "messenger".

*Spoke Yahweh's message to the people, saying, I am with you, says Yahweh-* The allusion is to the repeated promises that "I will be with you" in leaving Egypt and going in to possess the promised land and establish God's Kingdom there (Num. 14:43). This is what could have happened had the exiles left Babylon and returned to the land wishing to fulfil the restoration prophecies.

Haggai 1:14 *Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of*

*Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest-* In response to their desire to respond to the call for repentance, God stirred up their spirit / mind. He can work directly on the human heart, giving us attitudes and ideas; and He does so especially in response to our desire for this. Here we have a classic Old Testament example of the work of God's Spirit on human hearts, which becomes such a characteristic of New Testament Christianity. The same word is used of how He stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to allow the exiles to return (Ezra 1:1), and also the spirits of the exiles who decided to return (Ezra 1:5). Although their motives were on one hand not right, God also worked on their hearts. Human motivation is complex, but God worked there, confirming them as needed. It seems that the stirring up of spirit occurred when they left Babylon, and now again once they had flagged. It is similar to the New Testament idea of being filled up with the Spirit, as if there are moments of filling and refilling. And this stands true to our spiritual experience.

*And the spirit of all the remainder of the people; and they came and worked on the house of Yahweh of Armies, their God-* As noted on :12, only a remnant of the people left Babylon and of them, only a remnant repented.

Even with Ezekiel's prophecies behind him concerning "the prince", Zerubbabel was easily discouraged in the rebuilding, and needed the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah to encourage him again. He kept the feast of tabernacles (Ezra 3:4) but without dwelling in booths (Neh.

8:17)- i.e., half heartedly. He *could* have been Messiah, perhaps- he may well have been age 30/33 at the time of the restoration (Mt. 1:12,13). When Judah returned, they could have entered into the new covenant, featuring “nobles [an intensive plural, meaning ‘the great noble’]... and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them” (Jer. 30:21). Zerubbabel the Governor could have fulfilled this; but he flunked out. Yet God lifted up his spirit a second time (Hag. 1:14 cp. Ezra 1:5); he was given a second chance, such was God’s enthusiasm that he should achieve what was potentially possible for him. But again, he failed. He saw the glory of Babylon as more attractive than the hard work required to bring about Yahweh’s eternal glory in Zion. It is noteworthy how God worked through this man’s failures, and desired to give him (and all Israel) further opportunities. See on Zech. 5:11; 11:17 for evidence of Zerubbabel's return to Babylon.

Haggai 1:15 *In the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king-* It took 23 days for the whole process of appealing for repentance, repentance and then Divine stirring up of the minds of Zerubbabel. This seems to connect with how an Angel caused the 21 day - year delay in the rebuilding (Dan. 10:12,13; Zech. 3:1 etc. ); that was maybe representing the apathy of the Jews as well as the opposition of the Samaritans in the court of Heaven. The two Angel chariots



sent to overcome this opposition (see notes on Zech. 6) would therefore have tried to influence the Jews to be more genuinely committed to Zion's cause. Part of their work was in the inspiring of Haggai's words (note the many references to "the Lord of Hosts" in Haggai). Again, the context of Ezra 5:1 must be remembered- Haggai prophesied to encourage the people during the 21 year cessation of the rebuilding (details in Ezra 4).

## Haggai Chapter 2

Haggai 2:1 *In the seventh month, in the twenty-first day of the month, the word of Yahweh came by Haggai the prophet, saying-* As noted on Hag. 1:14,15, this allowed about a month for the Spirit of God to stir up the spirit of Zerubbabel and Joshua in response to their repentance. But despite that work of the Spirit on their hearts, they still needed to be called to respond to it (:4).

Haggai 2:2 *Speak now to Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remainder of the people, saying-* As noted on Hag. 1:14, only a remnant ["remainder"] returned from Babylon, and out of them, it seems only a remnant were responsive to the Spirit once they returned to Judah. But from this minority of a minority, God was prepared to work- even though there had not been the wholesale repentance and return which He envisaged, still He was eager to work with a handful of people. And yet tragically even they appear to have not responded in the long term to God's possibilities which He had set up for them. This is encouragement to keep on and on working with people, adjusting to whatever their dysfunction throws back at us, ever seeking the extension of the principles of God's Kingdom and His glory through whatever we have left to

work with.

Haggai 2:3 *'Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Isn't it in your eyes as nothing?'*- Some very old exiles would have remembered the temple from 70 years ago in their childhood, before the deportation. But the chronologies vary; Daniel 9,10 would suggest that the 70 year period was extended, hence Daniel's concern that the period had ended but still there was no restoration. So Haggai may mean 'Who is left who saw the previous temple? Nobody. And how do your eyes see it? As nothing, compared to the importance of your own houses?'

Is. 60:7 had prophesied that God would “*glorify the house of my glory*”. But this was in fact a conditional prophecy, capable of fulfilment through the freewill efforts of the returning exiles, if *they* wished to glorify that house. For they were empowered by Artaxerxes “*to beautify [s.w. “glorify”] the house of the Lord*” (Ezra 7:27). All their efforts to glorify / beautify the house, therefore, would have had God's special and powerful blessing behind them. But was the house ultimately glorified? No- for Israel would not. They got sidetracked by beautifying their own homes, building “*cieled / paneled houses*” for themselves (Hag. 1:4). The word for “*cieled*” occurs in 1 Kings 6:9; 7:3,7 to describe the roofing of the first temple- which they were to be rebuilding, rather than building their own houses. The glory would have

entered the house of God's glory as it did at the inauguration of the first temple (2 Chron. 7:1-3). Ezekiel prophesied that ultimately the glory would fill the temple as it had done then (Ez. 43:4,5). But God's prophesy of this in Is. 60:7, that He would glorify His house, meant that He was prepared to work through men to glorify it. The fulfilment of Ezekiel's vision of the cloud of glory entering the temple again could have been fulfilled if the exiles had done what Artaxerxes empowered them to do- to glorify the house of glory. And so the fulfilment was delayed. The glory of the temple the exiles built was tragically less than the glory of the first temple; and so it would only be in the last day of Messiah's second coming that the house shall truly be filled with glory (Hag. 2:3,7,9), and even that may require a reapplication and reinterpretation of the concept of God's house. And the lesson ought to be clear for us, in the various projects and callings of our lives: it becomes crucial for us to discern God's specific purposes for us, and insofar as we follow His leading, we will feel a blessing and power which is clearly Divine.

Haggai 2:4 *Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel!*' says Yahweh. *'Be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest! Be strong, all you people of the land', says Yahweh, 'and work-* We noted on :1 that a month had passed since the Spirit of God began working on their hearts. But they still needed to be stirred up to actually use that potential power- to be "be

strong... and work". The Corinthians likewise were given the Spirit, as 1 Cor. 1 makes clear, but they were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1) and needed exhortation to live according to the spiritual potential given them. And we are all in this position.

"Be strong... and work" [Heb. 'do'] is a phrase designed to recall previous usages in the context of returning to the promised land and building the temple. David often used it in encouraging Solomon to establish the Kingdom and build the temple (1 Chron. 28:10,20); it was the prophetic word to king Asa, encouraging him to re-establish temple worship and a spiritual revival (2 Chron. 15:7), and to Joshua in encouraging him to re-enter the land and overcome all opposition from the local tribes there (Josh. 1:7; 23:6); and particularly of being strong and working in rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple (Ezra 6:22; Neh. 2:18; 6:9). They were to accept that God was willing and eager to strengthen their hands in the work; but they had to make use of it.

*For I am with you', says Yahweh of Armies-* The repeated title "Yahweh of Armies" would have been understood as a reference to Yahweh as captain of armies of Angels. God makes His Angels spirits; they were a vehicle for the work of the Spirit at that time, as the book of Daniel demonstrates. All that Angelic working was behind every effort Judah would make to rebuild the temple. But they didn't use it. "I am with you *to save you* from Babylon" (Jer. 42:11) focuses God's presence upon His salvation- Jesus. The prophetic

potential became reapplied and rescheduled to us, in that the ultimate term of "I am with you" is in the Lord Jesus and the gift of the Spirit to enable us to extend and establish the work of the Kingdom (Jn. 7:33; 13:33).

Haggai 2:5 *This is the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, and My Spirit dwelt among you. 'Don't be afraid'* - "My Spirit (Angel- Ps. 104:4) remaineth among you" (AV), just as the same Angel was with them "when ye came out of Egypt". And with us too. God encourages those rebuilding Jerusalem to have faith because the Angel is still among them: "Yet now be strong. . . and work: for I (the Angel) am with you, saith the Lord of Hosts (Angels): according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt (the Angel made that covenant) so My Spirit (Angel) remaineth among you; fear ye not". Similarly Nehemiah recounts the past activities of God's Angel (Neh. 9:19-24) as a stimulus to faith in God bringing them through immediate problems. See on Gen. 24:40,56.

But as mentioned on :4, the Spirit was not simply an Angel; it was articulated through the work of God's Spirit on the human spirit or mind. The word of covenant when they came out of Egypt was the entire old covenant; the phrase is thus used at the time of the exodus (Ex. 24:8; 34:27; Dt. 29:1). But throughout Deuteronomy, the second statement of the

covenant, there was the repeated encouragement: "Fear not" (Dt. 1:21; 3:2; 20:3 etc.). The context is always of not fearing the local tribes of Canaan, and of being assured that it was simply God's good pleasure to give them the Kingdom. That essential desire of God was true in Haggai's time as it had been in Moses', and it abides true for us. As He sent the Angel before them and amongst them, so His Spirit was and is active in the hearts and circumstances of all who wish to be in His Kingdom and do the work of that Kingdom.

Haggai 2:6 *For this is what Yahweh of Armies says: 'Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the dry land-* In a "short time", God would yet once more (GNB) shakes the heavens and earth as He had done at Sinai when Israel had previously entered the land and taken the Kingdom (s.w. Ps. 68:8). The potential was that soon after Haggai's words [in "a little while"] there would be direct Divine intervention involving earthquakes and the shaking of all nations (:7) to support the re-establishment of God's Kingdom in Israel under the Messianic rulership of Zerubbabel. This is also foreseen in Zech. 14, where the earthquake is seen as creating a new plateau upon which a new temple could be built. This plateau was also seen in the opening of the Ez. 40-48 vision of the commandments as to how to build the new temple complex. But it didn't happen then. Judah didn't repent, and Zerubbabel beat it back to Babylon. These words have therefore been

reapplied and rescheduled, to the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross and to the final literal establishment of the Kingdom at His second coming; in this context they are quoted in Heb. 12:26-28.

*Haggai 2:7 And I will shake all nations-* This is the equivalent of Daniel's image of the nations being ground to powder and replaced by the mountain of God's Kingdom which cannot be shaken (:22; Dan. 2:44; Heb. 12:27). Then the prophecy of Ez. 38:20 could have come true, that all the nations within the *eretz* would "shake" (s.w.). These prophecies could have come true then, but they were rescheduled. The nations in the land and also the Medo Persian empire would be shaken to destruction soon, and so the exiles should not fear them and resume the rebuilding of the city and temple. This is powerful encouragement to us, who are to live as if we are on the eve of the Lord's return. But the Hebrew here is "I am shaking", whereas the shaking of :6 is in a future tense. The idea is that God was already working among the nations to bring about the re-establishment of His Kingdom which was then potentially possible.

*The precious things of all nations will come-* This could mean that they would all donate their wealth to the new system of worship in Jerusalem. Or the phrase could be translated "the desire of all nations", referring to Messiah. We note that the same word is used of Saul, the anointed



['messiah'] king of Israel (1 Sam. 9:20). This prediction would then be directly relevant to Zerubbabel, the intended Messianic ruler.

*And I will fill this house with glory, says Yahweh of Armies-* Just as Solomon's temple was filled with glory (1 Kings 8:10,11; 2 Chron. 5:13,14; 7:1,2). Haggai sought to inspire the people when they had flagged in their zeal for the Lord's house; and the method he chose was to remind them that they *could* bring about Messiah's Kingdom if they wholeheartedly worked with God to allow His ideal intentions to come to pass. Note the stress on *this* house- but that temple they built wasn't filled with glory, the vision of Ezekiel about the glory returning and entering the temple wasn't fulfilled- and Solomon's former temple was more glorious than that of the second temple. Why? Because they didn't get on and build it and glorify it as they were intended to.

If "the desire of all nations" does refer to Messiah coming with an earthquake and glory filling the temple, then this is a prophecy of what *could* have happened at that time, but it has been deferred to the second coming of the Lord Jesus. This is exactly the picture we have in Ezekiel 43, of a Messiah figure entering the temple in glory. But in Haggai's context, he is encouraging the Jews of his time that this is what really and truly could have happened then and there, had they been obedient. The cherubim visions of Ez. 1,9 and 10 are applied in the New Testament to the glorified Christ (Rev. 2:18; 1 Pet. 4:17; 2 Pet. 2:4-9). This surely implies that they

were ultimately fulfilled in the Messiah; and perhaps we are to understand that they could have had fulfilment in a Messiah figure at the time of the restoration.

It was God's plan that the light of His glory would enter into Zion at the restoration; but Israel had to act as if they believed this, and likewise show forth glory: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee" (Isaiah 60:1). He eagerly prophesied that "strangers shall build up thy walls... in my favour have I had mercy upon thee" (Isaiah 60:10)- not 'I am prepared to have mercy upon you', nor 'I will have mercy...'. God had had mercy upon them, and invited them to respond to it.

Perhaps Nehemiah was some kind of potential Messiah- for the surrounding Gentiles 'came up' to him and shared in the luxurious temple meals (a common Kingdom prophecy- the same Hebrew words are used for the Gentiles 'coming up' to the temple in Is. 60:5,11; Jer. 16:19; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:22). Those meals could have been the Messianic banquets. See on Mal. 1:10.

Haggai 2:8 *The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine*, says *Yahweh of Armies*- This may be in answer to the feeling of the exiles that 'We can't afford to do this work on God's

house. We need to sort out our own houses first' (Hag. 1:4). Such reasoning is often encountered amongst believers. God's response is that all the silver and gold on the planet is His. He would provide. And indeed He had done, through the generous provision of Cyrus for all the material needs connected with the rebuilding project. The reference could also be to the "precious things" of :7 which the nations will bring; they are already His, and to give wealth to Him is only to accept that we do not own it. For we 'give' to Him what is already His. "*The silver and the gold*" could refer to all the silver and gold [wealth] that there is. This would imply an urgency to the rebuilding- if all the wealth of the surrounding world was to enter the temple as a store house for it, then the temple must be rebuilt to store it. By being slack to rebuild the temple (Hag. 1:4) and not doing so according to the specifications in Ez. 40-48, the Divine purpose with it could not therefore come about. Petty human short sightedness therefore precluded the fulfilment of so much Divine potential.

Haggai 2:9 *'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former'*, says Yahweh of Armies- As noted on Hag. 1:8, God would have appeared in glory at the restoration of the temple. The glory of God and His presence was to appear in the temple; but if the Jews wouldn't rebuild the temple, then it wouldn't. In common with Ezekiel, Zechariah and Isaiah, Haggai speaks here of the possible glory that could

have been at the restoration, but which has now been postponed until the second coming. Compare this with what actually happened- the old men wept because the new rebuilt temple was nothing like the former temple; see on :3. The glory of the restored temple was prophesied as being far greater than that of the former; Is. 60:17 alluded to this in prophesying that “For brass [in Solomon’s temple] I will bring gold, and for iron [that was in Solomon’s fixtures] I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron”. But it simply didn’t happen, because God’s people were satisfied with a small, inglorious temple so that they could get on with building their own “cieled houses” (Hag. 1:4; the same word is used in describing how the temple of Solomon was “covered”, or cieled, with cedar).

*‘And in this place will I give peace’, says Yahweh of Armies-* Peace with God, forgiveness through grace. When the foundation stone of the temple was laid, there should have been excited acclamation: “Grace, grace unto it” (Zech. 4:7). But instead the old men wept when the foundation was laid, knowing that the temple was nothing compared to what it ought to be (Ezra 3:12). This would have been possible in Haggai’s time, had they built the temple according to the specifications in Ez. 40-48. But it was reapplied and rescheduled to fulfilment in the Lord Jesus, and His second coming. God’s promise of peace “in this place” couldn’t come about if Judah would not rebuilt the “place”. This is the urgency of the appeal.

Haggai 2:10 *In the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the Word of Yahweh came by Haggai the prophet, saying-* The wonderful potentials mentioned in the preceding verses were precluded by Judah's unspirituality, and Haggai now addresses that. In the two months since that prophecy (:1), there had been little progress.

Haggai 2:11 *Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying-* Haggai is addressed to Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest. Perhaps they were being asked to ask this question. The answer of the priests is given in :12 and :13 so we assume this was literally asked and answered. But in :12 Haggai asks the question, so perhaps this is addressed to Haggai. It is a common Divine method to ask a question in order to elicit a conclusion within the conscience of the questioned person.

Haggai 2:12 *'If someone carries holy food in the fold of his garment, and the garment touches bread, stew, wine, oil, or any food, will it too become holy?'* The priests answered, *No-* The questions of :12 and :13 lead up to the bald statement in :14 that the Jews are "unclean" and their work for God unacceptable. This hard statement is in juxtaposition to all the wonderful Messianic and Kingdom prophecies of the preceding verses, uttered just weeks previously. The

questions of :12 and :13 add up to this: Uncleanness can be passed on easily, whereas holiness is not passed on. Just a scrap of sanctified food caught up accidentally in the fold of a robe doesn't make that garment holy, and if that garment then touches the things offered in sacrifice to God, they are not thereby made holy. This was the essence of the argument being used by the Jews. They considered their unclean offerings were made clean through the most contorted and unrealistic path of reasoning. They thought they could be acceptable to God because of some legalistic, theoretical 'acceptability by association', even though the Mosaic law didn't support such reasoning. The mentality is seen today, in those nominal believers who imagine that their external association with some organized religion or denomination somehow guarantees their acceptability with God.

*Haggai 2:13 Then Haggai said, If one who is unclean by reason of a dead body touch any of these, will it be unclean? The priests answered, It will be unclean-* As explained on :12, the Jews were thinking that they were acceptable to God by some quasi spiritual, pseudo logical path of reasoning whereby a fragment of holy bread could pass on to them personal acceptability before God. But the reality was that this wasn't support by God's principles in the law. What the law emphasized instead was that uncleanness spreads. And they were unclean (:14).

Judah in the new temple would not “defile” Yahweh’s Name

any more (Ez. 43:7,8) e.g. by touching dead bodies (Ez. 44:25); but they were lazy to keep the uncleanness laws, they *did* defile Yahweh by touching dead bodies and then offering the sacrifices (Hag. 2:13,14 s.w.), just as Israel previously had been defiled by touching the dead bodies of their kings and then offering sacrifices (Ez. 43:7); but now, Judah thought they were above God's law, and therefore did exactly the same things which had caused the temple to be destroyed in the first place. The promise that Yahweh would dwell in the new temple was conditional on them not touching dead bodies (Ez. 43:9); but Hag. 2:13 makes it apparent that they did this very thing at the time of the restoration.

Haggai 2:14 *Then Haggai answered, 'So is this people, and so is this nation before Me', says Yahweh; 'and so is every work of their hands. That which they offer there is unclean-* The specific work of their hands was surely their partial rebuilding of the temple and offer sacrifice there, but not according to the specifications in Ez. 40-48. Their work was so compromised by their wrong attitudes that what they built was therefore unclean. The reference may also be to the animals and crops raised by 'the work of their hands' (:17) which they then offered as sacrifices; but this was rejected by God as unclean.

Haggai 2:15 *Now, please consider from this day and backward, before a stone was laid on a stone in Yahweh's*

*temple-* Every day counted. Haggai asked them to look back through the few months during which he had given his prophecies about the great possibilities for re-establishing the Kingdom with God's abundant blessing. Even during those days, they had been guilty of not responding, and so the drought had not been lifted.

Haggai 2:16 *Through all that time, when one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty, there were only twenty-* Blessings of good harvests, corn and wine, were all part of the blessings promised for obedience to the covenant. But throughout the days Haggai had been appealing to them, their last harvest had been eaten away by disease and plague ("blight, mildew, and hail", :17). These words may be addressed specifically to Zerubbabel and Joshua (see on hag. 1:1). They had lost their harvests, because of refusing to respond to the call of Haggai.

This verse gives very precise commentary on the state of the harvests in Judah after the return- grain stores were 50% below the norm, and the amount of wine produced was 60% less than *expected*. Surely these figures were well known to the people- for they had presumably worked them out, and Haggai is quoting their figures back to them. Notice how the people had worked out the yield of wine which they *expected*. The implication would seem to be that they returned to Judah expecting material prosperity, good



harvests and personal wealth; hence their bitter disappointment when they didn't get it. This, then, would appear to have been their motivation for the return- rather than obedience to the words of the prophets or a desire to see God's Kingdom established in His land.

Haggai 2:17 *I struck you with blight, mildew, and hail in all the work of your hands; yet you didn't turn to Me', says Yahweh-* This striking of the harvest had been over the two months or so since Haggai had prophesied and encouraged them to live up to their potential; see on :16. They had returned to the land, but not to God. They were still impenitent, blaming their situation on the sins of the fathers and of the Gentiles around them. The afflictions mentioned were the very punishments mentioned for committing unfaithfulness to the covenant, and which would climax in being removed from the land (Dt. 28:22; 1 Kings 8:37). They had returned to the land, but were doing the very things which had led to them being expelled from the land, and experiencing the same judgments which they had in the lead up to the exile (Am. 4:9).

Haggai 2:18 *'Consider, please, from this day and backward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, since the day that the foundation of Yahweh's temple was laid,*

*consider it-* They were being asked as in :15 to think back over the days since the rebuilding program began. Although they had apparently worked to rebuild the temple, day after day had been of drought and pestilence. Their work for God had been "unclean" (:14) because their motives were impure, as noted on Hag. 1:4. But there is a purposeful ambiguity with the word translated "backward"; it can also mean "upward" or effectively 'forward'. In this case, as suggested on :19, Haggai was urging them to repent that very day, and see the changes that would happen in the weather and the fertility of their land. "Consider..." was therefore an appeal for repentance. This appeal was repeated in the eighth month (Zech. 1:1,4,6); and there was apparent response to that appeal (Zech. 1:6). But now in the ninth month, it was apparent that the repentance was only nominal.

Haggai 2:19 *Is the seed still in the barn? Yes, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree haven't brought forth. From this day on I will bless you'* - The original could imply that God had promised blessing upon them, from the first day the rebuilding program started (:18). But it hadn't come. Their harvests were so small that it was as if they had never even sown anything, and the seed was still in the barn; and the fruit trees had not born anything. We see here how God can promise things which are conditional even if the conditions aren't highlighted; and so the promised blessing will not come about automatically. Or the original

could equally suggest that although indeed there had been no harvests, from that very day on "I will bless you", because God through Haggai hoped for their immediate repentance that day.

Haggai 2:20 *The Word of Yahweh came the second time to Haggai in the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying-* This must be the same 24th day of the ninth month which has been twice mentioned (:10,15). As expounded above, on that very day Haggai had begged for repentance, and invited them to make a note of the day and to see how God's blessing would be poured out afterwards, whereas before that it had been withheld. Haggai had declared this day a watershed. And now we have a prophecy which seems to assure Zerubbabel that he would in fact be made the Messianic ruler. Perhaps he did repent that day, and so God eagerly went ahead in the following prophecy and assured him that he could indeed achieve the Messianic potential he had.

Haggai 2:21 *Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, 'I will shake the heavens and the earth-* The repetition of "I will" is as if to say that the promise of major Divine intervention and the re-establishment of the Kingdom promised in :6 (see note there) would not come about, whereas its fulfilment had been in question. This would fit the suggestion made on :20 that Zerubbabel repented and so the Divine program and possibilities with him resumed.

The day when heaven and earth would be shaken was the day when the second temple was to be filled with glory as Ezekiel had said. *Then*, there would be major war between the Gentile nations, and Zerubbabel would be some kind of Messiah figure. But none of these things happened. Their fulfilment was delayed until the last days, when all nations who come against Jerusalem will slay each other, and “my servant” the Lord Jesus will be proclaimed as Messiah. *Then*, in our time of the end, the heavens and earth will be shaken (Heb. 12:26,27). It could have happened while the second temple was standing- but it didn't, thanks to Israel's indolence.

Haggai 2:22 *I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations. I will overthrow the chariots, and those who ride in them. The horses and their riders will come down, everyone by the sword of his brother-* Haggai 2:6,7 clearly stated that *very soon* the desire of all nations would come to the temple, and Yahweh would fill the temple with His glory, just as He had when the first temple was built (this is another proof that the temple of the restoration was to be based upon the pattern of Solomon's). This was to be brought about by Yahweh shaking all nations, with the result that in a great battle, they would kill each other; and *then* Zerubbabel “my servant” (a Messianic title) would be the King of God's Kingdom. But this didn't happen “soon” after those words were spoken.

Indeed, they are quoted in Heb. 12 as now having relevance to our last days. “I will overthrow...kingdoms” is the language of Dan. 2:44- perhaps it could have been that four kings arose after Nebuchadnezzar and then Babylon would have been destroyed. Thus Dan. 2:42 speaks of *the* singular Kingdom being divided, as if referring to the Kingdom of Babylon / Nebuchadnezzar. Thus the image stood complete when the stone hit it- the whole dynasty of Nebuchadnezzar was to be destroyed. But this didn't happen, and so other interpretations of the image prophecy became possible, each fitting perhaps less accurately than the intended fulfilment would have done. Likewise Haggai 2:22 continues by saying that in that “overthrow”, “the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother”. This is the language of Zech. 14:13; that prophecy also could have had a fulfilment at the restoration, but it is now deferred until the last days. That same passage also envisages an earthquake around Mount Zion, preparing a plateau upon which the temple could be built, as required in the temple plans of Ez. 40.

Haggai 2:23 *In that day, says Yahweh of Armies, will I take you, Zerubbabel, My servant, the son of Shealtiel', says Yahweh, 'and will make you as a signet ring, for I have chosen you', says Yahweh of Armies-* Setting as a signet ring effectively means Divine appointment as the king of Judah, as in Jer. 22:23-25. The re-established kingdom could have had

a Divinely appointed Messianic king in the line of David, Zerubbabel. Just a few months later, Zech. 3:8 speaks of "My servant the branch", a clear reference to Zerubbabel, "branch of God", as the Messianic ruler figure. God says He will do this; but it seems Zerubbabel didn't want it, and the people weren't ready or willing for it. And so the prophecy in essence is reapplicable to the Lord Jesus, the "My servant" of Isaiah's prophecies.

Dan. 9:25 appears to identify "the anointed one, a prince" with the restoration of Jerusalem after the return. The Masoretic punctuation of Dan. 9:25 actually suggests that 'Messiah the prince' appears after the first seven of the seventy weeks- perhaps there was the possibility 49 day-years after the command to rebuild Jerusalem for a Messiah to have appeared? This would've fitted Zerubbabel perfectly. Lk. 3:27 describes Zerubbabel as the head / chief / leader. The term Rhesa is incorrectly rendered in many versions as a name. Perhaps Luke's point was that the Lord Jesus was the final Messiah, after the failure of so many potential ones beforehand. 'Zerubbabel the chief' would then be a similar rubric to "David the king" in Matthew's genealogy (Mt. 1:16). Zerubbabel was the 'head' of the house of David (Ezra 4:3; Hag. 2:23; Zech. 3:8; 6:12,13), as was his descendant Hattush (Ezra 8:1-3 cp. 1 Chron. 3:22). As the grandson of Jehoiachin, Judah's exiled king, Zerubbabel would've been the legitimate king of Judah. Potentially, Hos.

1:11 could have come true: “Judah and... Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head [Zerubbabel?]; and they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel” (RSV). And perhaps as head of the house of David, Zerubbabel was intended to be the “David my servant” who would be the one king and one shepherd who would lead Israel back to the land from exile (Ez. 37:22,24). Significantly, Neh. 7:7 describes Zerubbabel as being at the head of twelve leaders of the returning exiles, who are called “the people of Israel” (cp. Ezra 2:2).

Zerubbabel like his people simply didn't live up to it; and the prophecies came to be fulfilled finally in Jesus. He could have been Yahweh's signet ring (Hag. 2:23), His specially favoured son- but he balked at the height of the calling. These things remain a continual challenge to we who likewise have so much Spirit-enabled potential.