

Pentecost 12  
Haggai 1  
August 15, 2010

The LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, ... the governor and the spirit of Joshua ..., the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people.

The people involved here were believers in the LORD and His promises of forgiveness from the Savior. But they were faltering believers. They were in a drift from the LORD and His Word. That drift away, if not checked and reversed, would turn them back into unbelievers.

The LORD stirred us their spirits. That is the way God's Word describes the how of the spiritual comeback. It does NOT use language that makes it seem that it is human decision, human choice, human resolution. It credits all such good things – yes, conversion, too – to the LORD God, both almighty and kind.

That naturally brings up yet another how question. How does the LORD stir up spirits? How does He stoke the flames of faith? How does He get people to respond obediently? As He did it here, in the Prophet Haggai's day is the way the LORD always does it.

It Took God's Word and the Trust God's Word Works to  
Get Things Done in the Church of Haggai's Day.

The people to whom the LORD sent His prophet Haggai had it hard.

This happened in the time of King Darius. That's just after the awful Babylonian Captivity of Jerusalem and Judah. That captivity happened because the vast majority of Judah had obstinately, for long centuries, rejected the LORD and His saving Word. God sent many prophets to them, but only a very few of the people faithfully listened to God's Word.

Because God loved them, cared about them, He could not just let them go down their self-chosen path to eternal destruction. So, God used the Babylonian Empire to discipline them. Discipline seems, at the time, awful to the ones disciplined. Discipline lovingly applied, however, is intended as a blessing.

Indeed, torn out of their country, at the least some of the people repented. And now, some of them, certainly among the most dedicated, took the opportunity offered by the ruler of the Medo-Persian Empire, and made the long, hard journey back home after 70 years of exile. Only about 50,000 people made this trip. How rightly they are called a remnant. Compare the fifty thousand (50,000) with the two million who left Egypt nearly 1000 years earlier. 50,000 is two and one-half percent the size. They certainly had a courageous faith to begin with.

What they came back to was a place still in ruin, a place overgrown by brush and brambles. They were residents, but they had really done nothing to restore anything. In fact, they were not friendly to the returning Jews.

The returnees had to work hard. They were truly pioneers. Pioneers always need to work very hard.

They showed their enthusiastic faith immediately upon their arrival, by laying the foundation for a new temple and by building a large altar of sacrifice. The previous temple, the one Solomon built, had been totally destroyed by the conquering Babylonians. At first, the remnant showed a strong faith, at first.

The early years of the apostolic mission work also saw strong, courageous faith in action. The early years of further Christian outreach into many parts of the world saw the same kind of faith. The early years of the reformation church witnessed believers willing to die for their faith in Jesus and His Word. The founding of Christian churches in America soon witnesses a dynamic, mission-minded church. Often the same thing is seen in individuals when God uses His Gospel to plant faith in Jesus in their heart. They are so exalted to serve and to confess their Lord and Savior to everybody.

At first! But as time goes by, something often happens. It's not good. In Jerusalem, when locals opposed their efforts to build the temple, and as they got involved in reestablishing themselves, in rebuilding, in clearing the land in order to farm it, they put the rebuilding of the temple on the shelf. No more temple building happened for decades.

Life turned out to be such a struggle. The people worked and they worked hard, but seemed to have so little to show for it. It was as if their purses had holes in the bottom. They just couldn't get ahead. We've all probably know the feeling. And even when we did seem to be building a little nest egg, all of a sudden along comes the big economic downturn from which we do not seem to be recovering very quickly at all, and overnight most of that nest egg was gone. Or, as it says in Haggai, what they did manage to bring home, God let it all get blown away.

What happened? Well, as time went by, the constant battles from their spiritually unfriendly neighbors and all the pressure of daily living caused them to get their priorities mixed up. God, God's Word, God's worship, God's kingdom wasn't the top priority, wasn't the center of their whole life anymore. Eeking out a living had taken over. That demanded all of the resources of their time and money and talents. No wonder it didn't seem to be bringing in the blessing they expected. After all, who must do the blessing of it all? Isn't it God?

God loved them. God saw how they were hurting. He also saw how, without the temple and its God-given patterns of worship, the people were cutting themselves off from all those sure promises of the Savior, of forgiveness, of God's promises. So, God, through Haggai, an ordinary man, gave them His Word, "Build My House Now!" I will be with you! I will protect you! I will bless you.

A miracle happened. The people listened. Every time a person listens to God's Word that is a miracle. You are miracles. God works miracles; He's the only One able to do so. God brings His saving power to bear by His Word. God's Word puts God's power into action. They built that temple. God was with them. God overcame their enemies. God blessed them. About 500 years later, Jesus came to that temple, still standing, even greatly added to, and preached and did

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miracles there and a few hundred yards away from that temple died to atone for the world's sin and rose to life to give us life eternal.

Listen to the Word of God! Put God and His interests first. Put our houses, our employments, our investments all after (under) God, after (under) His kingdom, after (under) His Word. Keep it that way. Show it by how you do things. Our Lord and Savior will bless us. Amen.