

“Just You Wait!”

Haggai 2:1–9

There are a couple of chapters in 1 Kings in which we are given some detailed descriptions about the construction of Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem. Chapters 5-6 reveal the kinds of materials that were used, where they came from, how they were collected, transported, and assembled. They tell us how many men were involved and how Solomon organized them. He assigned 30,000 men to get the cedars and pines from Lebanon; he had 70,000 carriers and 80,000 stone cutters and 3,300 foremen to oversee the work.

These chapters also describe the interior of the Temple, the intricate carvings, ornate moldings, bronze castings, scented paneling, and sacred furnishings, many of which were overlaid with gold, and all of which were fashioned by the some of the world’s most skilled artisans.

When you read these descriptions you can almost feel the enthusiasm and excitement of the people of Israel as they unite and, together, expend all their energy and direct all their efforts toward this grand and glorious project—a project that took seven years to complete. Of course, this was at a time when Israel was at the pinnacle of its power. They had subjugated all their enemies, they were at peace with all their neighbors, and they were the envy of the world. You detect an enormous sense of national pride—almost a sense of invincibility.

But we know what happened. Several generations passed and Israel wandered away from the LORD, going their *own* way and worshiping other gods. Their disobedience alienated them from God and stopped the flow of His blessings until He allowed them to be conquered and carried off to Babylon. Meanwhile Solomon’s Temple and most of the city were destroyed.

After seventy years of captivity God raised up Persia’s pagan King, Cyrus the Great, and moved Him to send the people of Israel back to Jerusalem, not merely to resettle, but to rebuild the Temple that was lying in ruins. The Babylonians had burned up all the cedar beams and paneling, and all of the pine flooring. But the massive stones were still on the temple site, and Cyrus was compelled by Yahweh to commission the Jews to get after it—to restore this once spectacular house of worship.

Upon returning to Jerusalem the people’s first concern was to take care of their own personal needs. They built homes, planted crops, and rebuilt the wall around the city. That was fine. But twenty years passed, and the people still had done nothing about the Temple; not because they didn’t have the time; not because they lacked resources or manpower, but because they were busy beautifying their own homes. And that offended God, because all the while *His* house was lying in ruins.

By procrastinating on the decision to rebuild the Temple the people of Israel were slighting God, they were disregarding His priorities, and they were communicating that His manifest presence in their midst was *not* that important. And as a result God sent a drought that drastically diminished their crops and their economy, and then He spoke to them through Haggai communicating His displeasure and issuing a call to repent.

Upon hearing the word of the LORD, the people responded immediately. They stopped being preoccupied with their own interests and went to work on the Temple. And we read in the first chapter of Haggai’s prophecy that as they did the LORD stirred their spirits. He ignited

a passion for the project; He energized and motivated them to enthusiastically *want* to participate. And then He promised that He would be with them.

So they went to work. A month after they began the LORD spoke again to His people through Haggai. We read in chapter 2 **verses 1-3**. *On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: “Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, ‘Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?’”*

There are a lot of literary formalities in the first couple of verses that might seem insignificant to a contemporary audience like us, but there is something in verse 1 that provides an important context. The seventh month is October. October was the busiest month of the year in the Jewish festival calendar beginning with the *Feast of Trumpets* (day 1), the *Day of Atonement* (day 10), and culminating in the weeklong *Feast of Tabernacles* (days 15-22). This word came to Haggai on day 21, the second to the last day of the *Feast of Tabernacles*.

The people had been celebrating these festivals on the very temple site on which they had just begun to work, which, even after a month’s hard labor, was still an unsightly ruin. In other words, it wasn’t a very *inspiring* venue—it wasn’t really conducive to a grand and glorious celebration.

Furthermore, it was during the *Feast of Tabernacles* four hundred years prior to this that Solomon had dedicated the *original* Temple. Haggai’s audience knew that, and couldn’t help but compare the pomp and pageantry that accompanied *that* dedication with *their* own subdued and somewhat awkward celebration on the present temple ruins. They couldn’t help but reflect upon just how far they had declined as a nation since the days of Solomon. They couldn’t help but survey the ruins of that once glorious temple and feel discouraged and overwhelmed.

And so the LORD, who, in chapter 1, had promised to be with them, offers a timely word of encouragement in verses 1-9, and He begins by asking them three rhetorical questions.

“Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory?” The answer? Very few. Those who had seen the original temple before it was destroyed had to be in their seventies or above, and while they were certainly to be commended for pulling up stakes in Persia and resettling in Jerusalem at their age, it was this group of old timers that were probably the most skeptical. They saw the piles of rubble and the charred timbers and the blackened stones and the mounds of debris; they saw how little progress had been made in that first month, and they just shook their heads. “It’ll never happen! It could never look like it once did. It’s not possible to resurrect these ruins to become the house of God it once was.”

God asks those that had seen the original Temple, *“How does it look to you now?”* The answer? Awful! Dreadful! Kind of like a really bad sequel to a really good movie—the kind that makes you want to cringe, that makes you wish they had just left well enough alone.

“Solomon’s Temple was so spectacular! It was an architectural wonder; it was a feast for the eyes! And what we have here, in comparison, is so *unspectacular*, so *inglorious*.”

God knew this is what they were thinking, so He asks, *“Does it not seem to you like nothing?”* That’s exactly how it seemed. Undoubtedly when these old timers were little children Solomon’s Temple had made a big impression on them. They had been awed by

its grandeur and overwhelmed by its magnificence. And now, as they surveyed the ruins, it seemed like nothing.

Now, to be fair, they weren't very far along in the process. In one month's time they might have been able to clear most of the rubble and begin identifying which stones went where. But there had already been a lot of backbreaking labor with very little to show for it, which only reinforced their doubt that these ruins could be resurrected to become the glorious temple it once was.

Which is precisely why the emphasis in verse 3 is the "*former glory*." What was the most impressive thing about Solomon's Temple? The architecture? The material elegance of the building? Its ornate and costly features?

No. The most impressive thing about the Temple was that, at the very end of the construction, when the Ark of the Covenant was put into the Holy of holies, the cloud of God's presence descended upon and filled that room so that it radiated with His glory.

God wants to remind these people that this temple is the same structure as Solomon's. The only difference is the "glory," and, as we will discover, God will soon remedy that difference (Boda, 126).

And so Yahweh gives them a timely word of encouragement. **Verses 4-5.** *But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD. 'Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the LORD, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the LORD Almighty. 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.'*

Three words of encouragement: First, "Be strong!" Not just physically, but mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. And the strength He is referring to is the result of knowing and believing that God Himself was present with them. "Be strong Zerubbabel, be strong Joshua, be strong all you people... for I am with you, declares the LORD Almighty."

The LORD says, "If I've commissioned you to do this work; if I have promised to be with you while you're doing it, then there is a *supernatural* dimension to this work that needs to be taken into consideration every time you pick up your tools, every time you pound your hammers and chisels, every time you carve or set your stones.

In other words, this project isn't going to be successful because of *your* skill as stonecutters and carpenters and craftsmen. It's not going to be successful because of your genius and creativity and artistry. It's going to be successful because *I'm* with you, and I'm suffusing *My* energy and *My* strength and *My* wisdom into your bodies and minds so that *My* will can be done and *My* glory can be displayed."

And friends, that is just as true of the Lord's work today, whether it is in the building project or in the various ministries that God has led us to do here at EBC. God has given each of us spiritual gifts and talents and resources, and He's put us together as a church so that we can be the body of Christ in this community. But we need to be conscious that there is a supernatural dimension to our service, without which we would only spin our wheels.

Our success in the Lord's work is not determined by our skill, our eloquence, our intelligence, our charisma, our numbers, our resources, our strategies and methods. Our success is completely dependent upon the Lord infusing *His* strength, *His* energy, *His* skill, *His* vision, *His* wisdom, *His* grace, *His* love, and whatever else is needed to do what *He* wants done. And He can (and often does) use the most ordinary, seemingly unimpressive people to do His greatest work. Because it's *never* about people; it's all about *Him*.

Incidentally, one of the reasons the people of Israel felt so weak and intimidated by this project is because they were relatively few in number. There were less than 30,000 of them who lived in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas at this time. By contrast, Solomon had nearly 200,000 full time laborers when He originally built the Temple!

But, once again, God wants them to know that strength is not in numbers; strength is not even in exceptional leadership like Solomon provided. Strength is determined by whether or not *God* is in it. And if He *is* in it, it *will* succeed—it *will* bring glory to His name!

The LORD's second word of encouragement is "*work*". Just get at it...one stone at a time, one timber at a time, one step at a time. Don't be overwhelmed by the enormity of the job. Don't be daunted by your apparent lack of manpower. Don't succumb to those feelings of inadequacy. Just get to work, and you will be successful! Why? Because, once again, *I am with you!* And then He reminds them, *'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you.'*

Think of the obstacles the people of Israel faced when they left Egypt. There was the Red Sea. They had no food to eat or water to drink. It was an inhospitable environment, and there were hostile enemies. But none of those things proved to be an obstacle for the LORD. He transcended every barrier, solved every problem, provided for every need, and protected from every adversary, oftentimes performing miracles in order to do so. And He did it because He had made a covenant with the people that He would be *with* them every step of the way.

God wants the people in Haggai's day to know that they were the beneficiaries of the *same* covenant and could be assured of the *same* result.

Then third, Yahweh says, "Do not fear!" Why? Same reason...*"for I am with you!"*

Never mind that you have no political or military power. Never mind that you are a struggling province that is dwarfed by the powerful Persian empire. Their power and sovereignty is nothing compared to Mine. I'm the one in charge. I'm the One who governs this universe; I'm the One who determines what will happen.

Look at **verses 6-7**. *"This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. ⁷ I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty.*

The reference to Yahweh previously shaking the heavens and the earth is the incident at Mount Sinai when God revealed Himself to Moses and the people of Israel after their exodus from Egypt. We read in Exodus 19, *"...There was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled...Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently (19:16, 18).*

That was a frightening, unsettling experience for those who witnessed it, but it was intended to actually help the Israelites feel safe and secure. Because the God who controlled nature, the God who was a consuming fire, was the God who called *them* to be His very own people, who promised to never leave them or forsake them, to protect them and provide for them.

But Haggai tells us that God was about to shake the heavens and the earth once more. Only this time He would also shake the sea, the dry land, and all nations. When God shakes

the nations the result would be that *“the desired of all nations will come,”* an action identified in the following phrase as fulfilling God’s intention to fill the temple with His glory (Boda, 120).

What is *“the desired of the nations”*? The context reveals that this is a reference to the material treasures given for the rebuilding project. In other words, the result of God shaking all nations would be that these Gentile nations would be compelled to give silver and gold and other material resources to adorn God’s temple.

God’s *right* to shake the nations and extract their treasures for His temple is backed up by **verse 8**. *‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD Almighty.*

It stands to reason that if all the material resources in the world—gold, silver, diamonds, precious metals and stones—can be traced to the Creator of them all, then ultimately they all *belong* to Him, not to the men and women whom He created to be stewards of the earth.

When you read about Solomon’s wealth in 1 Kings you cannot help but be astonished by the staggering amount of gold that was imported to Jerusalem. He received 25 tons of gold every year from the surrounding nations. He was king for 40 years. That is 1000 tons, or 2 million pounds, or 32 million ounces.

Who was ultimately responsible for bringing that gold to Jerusalem? Solomon? Who gave him his wisdom so that he became renowned and sought after by the rulers of the world? Who gave him his riches? The LORD. Why? Because He’s sovereign, and He can shake or stir or move anyone who has possession of gold or any other valuable resource to release it and give it to Him. In other words, resources, even the most valuable resources, are not a problem for God. If He wants to glorify Himself there’s no stopping Him, and He can do so even when the present circumstances are shaky and the future looks bleak.

Look at **verse 9**. *‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the LORD Almighty.”*

The English translation of this verse can be a bit confusing. God is *not* comparing two different houses, but two different kinds of glory in the same house. He doesn’t distinguish between Solomon’s temple and the temple that is being rebuilt four hundred years later. But He *does* distinguish between the *glory* of each, and He wants these people to know that when they finish rebuilding His house and He takes possession of it He will turn up the rheostat of His glory even *higher* than it was in Solomon’s day, at the pinnacle of Israel’s prominence.

To a discouraged people who were intimidated by the idea that they would try to have to match the splendor of Solomon’s Temple, this message would have brought a great deal of comfort and hope.

He also says that in that Temple He would *grant peace*. In other words, the glory that God would bring into the temple would spill over into the community of God’s people. Because of God’s glory and the renown and respect that it would bring to Him throughout the world, the people of Israel would benefit. They would be respected and honored as well, resulting in peace and prosperity.

The Lord’s message was a timely word of encouragement. He calls a discouraged and intimidated community to work with renewed strength and without paralyzing fear. Once again, it is the promise of His presence and His sovereignty over the nations that provide them with hope to keep pressing on and complete the task. For not only would God provide

the strength and energy and wisdom for them to effectively do His work, He would supply the resources that were lacking, resources that seemed impossible to obtain.

I would guess there are some of us here today who are struggling with God's call upon our lives. We're pretty sure we know what He wants us to do; we know, by faith, that He's gifted us and equipped us to do it; but we look at our circumstances and we feel intimidated and fearful and weak. We take inventory of ourselves and our resources and it seems inadequate. We have no vision, no strength, no courage, no motivation, no money, no clue, and no one to help. And it looks daunting; it *seems* impossible.

If that describes you, I've got news for you. You are primed for great blessing...*if* you put your complete confidence in the Lord and take the steps to start doing what He's asked you to do. Because when God calls us to do something He gives us everything we need to do it effectively. And I mean everything... for there is no shortage of resources with Him. And He is more than willing to supply them generously if we ask Him and trust Him for them.

Just You Wait! **Haggai 2:1–9**

Main Idea: No matter how unimpressive our work for the Lord may seem to us, if He is in it, it will inevitably produce impressive results.

Progress Report (3)
Three Rhetorical Questions

Comparatively Unimpressive

The Lord's Encouragement (4–5)
“Be Strong...for I am with You!”

“Work...For I Am with You!”

“Don't Fear...For I Am with You!”

Seeing the Big Picture (6–9)
Divine Shaking

Greater Glory

The Promise of Peace

Principles:

1. Strength is not in numbers; strength is determined by whether or not God is in it
2. No matter how unimpressive our work for the Lord may seem to us, if He is in it, it will inevitably produce impressive results.
3. God's presence is more important and impressive than any building, because when He is present His glory and power can be displayed