

# Abiding Fruit

*Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart*

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## **Shaking The Nations Haggai 2:7**

Those exiles who returned from the Babylonian Captivity sometime in 538 BC came back to Judah and Jerusalem with the express purpose of rebuilding the Temple of God. Ezra reminds us that the possibility of return was because God had promised that they should return according to the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah (prior to the Captivity), and that Cyrus the Persian king was moved by God to be instrumental in casing the exiles to go back to their homeland (Ezra 1:1 – 4). Cyrus specifically asked that the temple of God be rebuilt in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2, 3). In response to this, about 50,000 exiles under Zerubbabel made the return trip together with their goods and funds to begin the work of rebuilding (Ezra 2:64 – 69).

The foundation for the new temple was laid in 536 BC (Ezra 3:6, 8 – 13). It was not long, however, before the exiles were hampered by adversaries. These adversaries initially suggested that they help Zerubbabel and Joshua build the temple, but their help was refused because they were not Jews and had no connection with the people of God. These adversaries caused great trouble for the exiles that the work of rebuilding was hindered (Ezra 4:1 – 4). Eventually these adversaries wrote to Ahasuerus, king of Persia, a letter of accusation which resulting in a decree from the king that the work cease (Ezra 4: 5 – 24).

It was through the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets of God, that the people were encouraged to rebuild the temple after a period when no work was undertaken. A letter was sent to Darius who had become king of Persia. He examined the records and found the decree by Cyrus permitting the exiles to rebuild, and so he authorized that the work continue (Ezra 5:6 – 6:1 – 12).

When we turn to Haggai, we learn that there has been a delay of at least 16 years from the laying of the foundation and the further progress made to the time of Haggai's prophecy concerning their failure to complete the work. They have stopped working because they had become occupied with their own personal projects. Personal preferences have hindered God's business. The prophet preaches some very serious sermons to the nation, that was designed to fire the people up to complete the original task.

There is a lesson here for us. Opposition can easily dissuade us from doing God's work. Pessimism can set in very easily and then we stop doing what God wants us to do. This is a tactic from the enemy of our souls. He has been using it for thousands of years. Pessimism leads to lethargy, and once lethargy sets in, spiritual work becomes very difficult. This is why the people had stopped working. The opposition was too much for them and so they forgot about God and what He wanted.

Their excuses ranged from the threat of political interference and the far-fetched idea that the temple was only supposed to be completed after the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt. So instead of doing God's work, they did their own building projects. They built beautiful new houses for themselves (Hag. 1:2 – 4). It was in this context that God had called Haggai and Zechariah to minister to the nation. They got involved personally in the work themselves (Ezra 5:1, 2).

The prophecy of these two prophets is very precisely dated: (see Hag. 1:1 = Sept. 1, 520 BC; Hag. 1:15 = Sept. 24, 520 BC; Hag. 2:1 = Oct. 21, 520 BC; Zech. 1:1 = Nov. 52 BC; Hag. 2:10, 20 = Dec. 24, 520 BC; Zech. 1:7 = Feb. 24, 519 BC; Zech. 7:1 = Dec. 4, 518 BC). The rebuilding of the temple would take from 520 to 516 BC (see Ezra 6:15). In their sermons, the prophets encouraged the people to set their priorities in order. If they did this and completed the temple, then they could expect the blessing of God upon their labors.

Haggai 2: 7 is considered a key verse in the prophecy. It should be noted that twice in chapter 1, that God through the prophet urges the people to “*consider your ways*” (1: 5, 7), and that twice in chapter 2 we find the phrase, “*consider from this day onward*” (2:15, 18). These are important because they draw attention to what follows. Considering our ways causes us to stop and look – are we on the right path or are we doing what we should be doing? This is what God wanted His people to think about. Finishing the temple was a major project that would bring glory to God. In my opinion, Haggai 2: 3 – 9 presents a comparison between the former temple under Solomon and the latter temple (being rebuilt in 520 – 516 BC), but that it is also a reference to the glory of the temple in a future day as well.

This is indicated by the usage of certain terms which do not apply immediately to the context of 516 BC. For instance, in verse 6, God promises something that is future to the current situation in Haggai 2. He will “*shake the heavens, the earth, the sea and the dry land*” (Hag. 2:6; also 2:21 - 23). The phrase “*yet once more*” is used signifying that God has done this before, and is going to do it again. We can connect this to Hebrews 12:26, 27, where we are told similar things, (“*At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens. This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken- that is, things that have been made- in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain*”).

More than just shaking the elements themselves, God is going to shake (רָעַשׁ ra`ash) the nations (2:7). This is the word for quake or shake. It means to agitate (compare Joel 2:10). It involves sovereignty over physical forces. God was going to do something to the nations that would cause them to bring their treasures into the temple that would far surpass the glory of Solomon’s temple, and God’s final promise in verse 8 is that he would give peace. It is hard to imagine either this temple in 516 BC, upgraded by Herod the Great, destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, as being the recipient of this glory and this peace. Certainly the inter-testamental years (from Malachi to Christ) were years of warfare, strife, hardship and desecration of the temple (Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 BC).

Surely the shaking of the nations has to do with the second advent of our Lord climaxing the great Tribulation period. If and when another temple is to be rebuilt, it seems logical to place this temple at a time when Messiah shall reign and bring His peace, since He did not do this during the 400 years of silence or during His first advent. In fact, during our Lord’s ministry, He promised the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, which took place in AD 70. The promise of God in Haggai must be to another temple, probably the same as the one described in Ezekiel 40 – 48. Should one argue that Haggai’s prophecy is limited to Haggai’s time or in the very near future from the time of his prophecy, then the question is where and how did this shaking of the heavens, the earth, the sea and the land, let alone the temple, take place? To place these events in AD 70, also does not make sense, for when was there a shaking of these physical elements. The coming of the Son of Man is after the tribulation (of those days as in Matt. 24:29 -31), when the powers of the heavens will be shaken (see Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24, 25; Luke 21:25 – 26; compare 2 Pet. 3:10 – 13).

God promises His blessing to His people through His sovereign purposes for the nations to be revealed in a future time. In the meantime, as we wait for a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13), let us occupy ourselves with God’s work and not our own.

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