

The Causes of Spiritual Awakening

Haggai 1:12-15

Slide 1

For the past two Sundays, we've been looking at the subject of spiritual apathy and the message Haggai was sent to deliver to God's people.

The wonderful thing about the book of Haggai is that, although it starts off on a negative note, pointing out the sins and failures of the people of God, it's really a very positive and encouraging book.

Haggai goes on to chronicle the spiritual revival that took place among God's people as they turned from their sin and rededicated themselves to the work to which God had originally called them.

Haggai saw what few of the prophets of the Old Testament era saw as a result of their preaching, namely, a positive response by God's people to the preaching of His Word.

In short, Haggai witnessed a spiritual revival that resulted in observable, tangible changes that took place in their lives; changes that brought their lives into conformity with God's will.

So, today we want to begin to look at the more positive and encouraging subject of the spiritual awakening that took place.

So, today I want us to consider the cause of this spiritual awakening, how it came about and what made the people take up, once again, the work of God that they had neglected for so long.

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At this time in history, God hadn't actually spoken to the people through a prophet for many years. This was one of the consequences of their past sins.

In the past, they had mistreated God's prophets when they delivered God's Word. The people ignored them, ridiculed them, persecuted them and killed them.

Because of this, God said He would punish them by sending a famine of the Word. In other words, God was no longer going to speak to them.

Then, for many years, there was silence from heaven. No prophets came forward with an authoritative, *"Thus saith the Lord."*

Now, Ezra had ministered to the people upon their return, but Ezra's primary role was that of priest.

Any message Ezra brought to the people from the Lord was by way of expounding and explaining those revelations of God's will which had previously been given in the Law.

Despite the fact that the people, who had returned from Babylon, had been in a state of spiritual apathy for some 16 years.

Regardless that they deserved nothing but punishment from God on account of their sin, God in His grace had purposed to change them and bless them.

One of the means He used to awaken his people was by sending them a man who would declare the Word of God to them.

So, on the first day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius, something happened in Jerusalem that hadn't happened for many years. God spoke to the people through a prophet.

That man was Haggai and the message Haggai brought to the people was a relevant message dealing with issues that needed to be addressed.

In no uncertain terms, Haggai told the people what God thought about the matter and what God wanted them to do about it.

Haggai knew the major areas in which the people were sinning and it was that subject that constituted the substance of his message to them.

He didn't come to speak about how the Sabbath was to be observed, or the fact that they weren't to worship idols, nor did he remind them of the sinfulness of murder.

He dealt with the immediate spiritual problem in the life of the people – their sin of spiritual apathy which included their self-centeredness, worldly-mindedness and their ungratefulness for all that God had done for them.

He pointed to the ruins of the temple and told them what God thought about their neglect of that important work.

“These people say the time is not yet come for the Lord’s house to be built...Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses while this house remains a ruin...my house remains a ruin while each of you is busy with his own house”

Haggai brought God's Word to the people, a message that was relevant because it addressed the issues that needed to be addressed.

A message that told the people, in no uncertain terms, what God had to say about the matter.

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Not only was God's message relevant, but it was also challenging. It wasn't the sort of message the people would've wanted to hear.

Not only did it highlight their sin, but it called them to do something about that sin, namely to turn from it and make changes that were necessary to bring their lives into conformity with God's clearly revealed will.

It was a message that hit home and demanded a response. It said, *'You are not living as you should and God's calling you to do something about it.'*

And, because it was such a relevant message, such a challenging message, it would've been unwelcome.

Unwelcome in the sense that it wasn't the sort of message the people would've wanted to hear. It was too pointed. Too direct. Too personal.

It hit too close to home. It dealt with matters that they would rather Haggai had left alone.

They would've rather heard a nice, positive encouraging message about God's love, God's power and God's goodness. Something that made them feel good.

They didn't want to hear something that exposed their sin, challenged their way of life and demanded that they change.

Because this message was so relevant, so challenging and so unwelcome, it required both courage and faithfulness on the part of the prophet to deliver it.

Now, Haggai would've been all too aware of the way the people had treated prophets in the past.

He knew some had been mocked, threatened, and disowned not only by the people in general but also by their own family circles.

When, in the name of God, prophets reproved the people for their sin, challenged their selfish attitudes and worldly conduct and called them to repentance and obedience.

He knew if he stood up and proclaimed what God had given him to preach, that there was a real possibility he might end up being treated in the same way as his predecessors, but Haggai didn't shrink from the task.

God had given him a message to declare. It was a message the people needed to hear if there was going to be the radical change that was needed in their lives.

So, on the first day of the sixth month in the second year of the reign of Darius, or the 29th of August, 520 B.C., Haggai demonstrated his faithfulness to God and his courage before man when he proclaimed God's Word.

It was Haggai's faithful preaching that God used to awaken His people from their spiritual apathy and revive their zeal and commitment to His work.

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When God purposes to bring about a spiritual awakening in the life of a believer or in the life of a congregation, one of the means He uses is the faithful preaching of His Word.

Preaching that's relevant to the needs of the hour. Preaching that addresses spiritual issues. Preaching that exposes God's people of their sins. Preaching that bring lives into conformity with God's will.

When God's people fall into a state of spiritual slumber, it's the faithful preaching of God's Word that He uses to awaken them; to restore their spiritual desires, and to reinvigorate their spiritual activity.

You get a beautiful illustration of this in Ezekiel 37, in the vision that God gave to the prophet of the valley of dry bones.

In that vision, God wasn't just showing the prophet what He could and would do, but the chief means He was going to use to bring revival, which was the preaching of God's Word.

Ezekial 37:9, "Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'"

Although it seemed hopeless, although it seemed irrational and a waste of time and effort, the prophet obeyed the Lord.

Ezekial 37:10, "So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army."

The revival that took place during the reign of King Josiah came about as a result of the Word of God being found and then being brought to the king and explained to him.

When this was done, the king realized how far God's people had strayed from God's will. When their sin had been exposed, the king and the people repented and turned to the Lord in renewed covenant obedience.

This revival came about as a result of them hearing the Word of the Lord. Now God doesn't speak to me or to any other preacher in the same way that he spoke to Haggai.

I don't sit around during the week and wait until I hear a voice from heaven giving me the message that I bring to you each Sunday.

That's not how God speaks to us in our day and generation. God has given us the completed revelation of His mind and will in the Scriptures, the 66 books of the Bible.

When a preacher faithfully expounds the passage of scripture with which he's dealing; drawing out the legitimate, practical implications of that portion of scripture, God's speaking to us in that message.

If, in the course of the regular exposition and application of the scriptures, some sin in your life is exposed, some raw nerve touched, don't despise either the message or the messenger.

It may be that that God has gracious purposes in mind for you. He may be going to bring spiritual blessings into your life.

God is exposing your sin in order to make you face up to it, confess it, turn from it and thus be brought into a much closer walk with Him in which you'll be able to experience the blessings you've been missing.

If the preaching of the Word is the means God uses to bring about a spiritual awakening among God's people, we need to be praying that God would raise up many such preachers in our day throughout our land.

Preachers who're faithful to the charge God has given them. Courageous preachers who're not afraid to expose sin, challenge God's people, and call them to repentance.

Preachers who, as they expound the scriptures, are able to say, "*Thus saith the Lord.*" Preachers who fear the face of God more than the face of man. Pray that the churches of our land will be filled with such preachers.

But, while faithful preaching of the Word of God was one of the means God used to bring about spiritual awakening, it wasn't the only means He used.

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Haggai 1:14a, *“So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people.”*

The preaching of the Word was vitally important but, in and of itself, such preaching wouldn't guarantee a positive, life changing response from those who heard it.

Other prophets had been faithful in bringing God's Word to the people only to witness them harden their hearts to the message they heard.

Zechariah, a contemporary of Haggai, reminds the people that this was how their forefathers had reacted to the message of former prophets.

Zechariah 7:11-12, *“But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and covered their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the Lord Almighty was very angry.”*

Something was needed in addition to faithful preaching and that something was the gracious, powerful and effective work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the people.

This is exactly what happened as Haggai preached. God, the Holy Spirit, *“stirred up”* the people. There was a positive, divine influence exerted upon their minds and hearts.

Spiritually speaking, the people were slumbering through the message that the prophet brought to the people, but God stirred them out of their slumber.

The words of the prophet were taken and applied to the consciences of the people. Applied in such a way as to bring about a positive, God glorifying response in the lives of those who heard.

John Calvin, commenting on this verse, said, *“God roused the Spirit of Zerubbabel and of the whole people: And hence it was that they received the message of the prophet and were attentive to His words...they became obedient through the hidden impulse of God...Let us know then that Haggai’s labors produced fruit because the Lord effectually touched the hearts of the people.”*

Calvin goes on to say by way of application, *“We would never be attentive to His Word, were He not to open our ears. And there would be no inclination to obey were He not to turn our hearts.”*

Without the accompanying inner work of the Holy Spirit upon the hearts and minds of those who’re being addressed, the preaching of the Word won’t produce spiritual fruit in people’s lives.

Sinners won’t be saved unless the Holy Spirit effectually applies the Word that has been faithfully proclaimed.

Paul preached the Gospel to the women gathered on the banks of the Gan-gites river on the outskirts of Philippi, but it was the Lord who opened Lydia’s heart so that she believed the message and trusted in Christ as Savior.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul reflected upon his first visit to Corinth when, during his eighteen month stay in that city, he preached the Gospel.

1 Corinthians 2:1-4, *“And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power.”*

It’s the Holy Spirit Who imparts life to the spiritually dead soul, regenerates the soul of the Hell bound sinner and brings them to the point where they want to trust in Christ for salvation.

It’s the Holy Spirit Who speaks to the conscience and touches the heart of the Christian who has fallen into sin, and Who, by stirring them up, brings them to the place of repentance and renewed obedience.

Nothing of any positive, spiritual consequence will be accomplished through the preaching of the Word unless that preaching is effectually applied to the hearts of men and women by the Holy Spirit.

This is why we ought to be in prayer that God wouldn’t only raise up faithful preachers but that He would send forth His Holy Spirit to work in a powerful and effectual way as the Word is being preached.

This is why, before we come to church, we ought to take time to pray that God the Holy Spirit would so own and apply the message we hear from His Word, that we might be stirred as the people of God in Haggai’s day were stirred.

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A third and final means God used to bring about spiritual awakening among His people was the act of serious reflection by the people.

As part of Haggai's message, he called upon the people to give careful consideration to what God was saying to them. In vs 5, and 7 he says to them *"give careful thought to your ways."*

The phrase literally means *"set your heart upon"* or *"direct your heart towards"* your ways. It means to think deeply and earnestly about something. To seriously reflect upon some issue. To turn the matter over in your mind.

The issue Haggai dealt with was the issue of their spiritual condition, particularly the state of spiritual apathy into which they had fallen.

He's telling them, *"God wants you to take time out to think about your spiritual condition. That's why He sent me to bring this message to you."*

It's evident, from the way in which the people responded to Haggai's message, that they did give careful thought to their ways.

They spent time seriously reflecting upon the Word Haggai had brought and all that was entailed in that Word.

Such serious reflection upon the Word of God was produced by the working of the Holy Spirit which led to the spiritual awakening that took place among the people.

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Conclusion

God calls us to serious reflection on the preaching of His Word. We ought to reflect on God's Word every time we hear it being preached.

But there are times when this is especially important; times when God, in His Word, is exposing sin in our life and calling us to take time out to give serious consideration to the state of our spiritual lives.

I believe God has not only said, at one time or another in the course of our Christian lives, but is saying it to us today, *“Give careful thought to your ways.”*

There are things about our life as a Christian that aren't what they should be and we need to give serious thought to them.

God is telling us that we're not as committed to Him and His work as we should be. We're not as involved as we should be. We're not growing as we should be.

We're not reading and praying as we should be. We're not living as holy a life as we should be, so *“Give careful thought to your ways.”*

It was a result of the people taking time to seriously reflect upon the message Haggai brought that the wonderful change we read of in the latter part of this chapter took place in their lives.

May God, the Holy Spirit, apply the message of God's Word we've heard this morning to cause us to consider our ways and to respond to the Word as Haggai's contemporaries did.