

Come Follow Me
Elo Viz production
Week 50
Haggai & Zechariah

We are nearing the end of the Old Testament and the final three books. I'd like to express how grateful I am for the Old Testament, I have learned so much this year, I received so much more out of the Bible than I ever thought I would. I hope you feel the same way. There is something magical about studying the history of our ancestors and how God was so present in their lives. I'm grateful that God preserved the record and the message for us. I am also grateful for the season that is quickly approaching and the opportunity we have to really focus on the true meaning of Christmas. I love this time of year where the "hustle and bustle" means more than just shopping and gifts. It means families will be together, memories will be made and Jesus will be the center of thoughts even if for some it is only for a brief moment. I know their lives will be blessed for that moment of worship. Now to our study this week.

The book of Haggai has only 2 chapters, and he is known as a post-exilic prophet. What that means is his ministry was after the Jews returned from their captivity in Babylon. And the true lesson we can learn this week in our study of Haggai is not necessarily in the text but in the history of the circumstances. I will recap just briefly.

God had sent many prophets to try and turn the hearts of His people. They were almost entirely rejected and scourged for their efforts. The children of Israel were just not getting the message and not willing to give up their false Gods and idol worship. The book of Mormon gives a pretty good explanation when they too were expecting and waiting for the coming of the Messiah. It says "all this iniquity had come upon the people because they did yield themselves unto the power of Satan." (3 Nephi 7:5)

So they stoned the prophets, they rejected their messages, and they kept choosing the world over their God. Not all of them. We still had pockets of righteous people that served God wholeheartedly. But as a majority, the people rejected the God of mercy. And so as we read about for the last couple of weeks, God sent the Babylonians to humble them. They came in and took all the people captive and on the last wave destroyed the city and burnt the temple to the ground.

For the next 70 years the people would be captive in Babylon until God prepared King Cyrus to let the Jews go back to their home land and rebuild their temple. What a blessing it was for them to finally return home. They immediately got started with the temple and the foundation was laid. Then all of a sudden it stopped. Everyone put down their tools and left. The temple went without any progress of reconstruction for 16 years. This is when Haggai comes on to the scene. This is what he is describing as he approaches the people. This is what he says in Chapter one starting in verse one:

"1 In [the second year](#) of Darius the king, in the sixth [month](#), in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto [Zerubbabel](#), governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the high priest, saying,
2 Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.
3 Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying,

4 *Is it* time for you, O ye, to dwell in your **ceiled** houses, and this house (the Lords house) *lie* [in] waste?

5 Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; **Consider** your ways.

6 Ye have **sown** much, and bring in little; ye **eat**, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that **earneth** wages **earneth** **wages** to put it into a bag with **holes**.

7 Thus saith the Lord of hosts; **Consider** your **ways**.”

Haggai is chastising them; He is saying God delivered you, and all you're concerned with is building your own homes and have left the temple untouched. And because of this I have not prospered you in the land. You work hard and you can't provide. You eat and you're still hungry, you drink and you're still thirsty. And I'm sure a lot of us can relate to this last one. You earn wages and you put it in a bag with holes. It just disappears.

What's amazing about this account is that something happens that has never happened before in the history of the children of Israel...They listened to the prophet...They actually took courage from Haggai's council and they started building the temple again. In fact they worked so hard that the temple was completed within the next 4 years. The account of Haggai overlays with the events that took place in the book of Ezra.

There are two main principles we can learn from the book of Haggai. The first is obvious; our priorities need to be with God and His work. It is an easy thing to see when we learn about how they focused on their own interests and let the work of God go unaided for 16 years. God obviously had a problem with that. I'm sure this point is to be the focus of most podcasts and sermons on the book of Haggai. I however would like to point out something that may have been overlooked while we study this book. It comes on the heels of a great question we can ask about any book we study: "Why?" Why did they stop building the temple? After finally getting to return to their home land and getting the foundation laid, why all of a sudden the focus shifted?

This perhaps is a question that we should use more often. When someone does something we don't agree with or expresses an opinion that may differ from our own. Instead of rushing to correct or to force our agenda, maybe asking why will help us see as they see, to understand the journey from their view point. Let me show you what was happening at this time with the Jews that may give us a different perspective.

While the Jews were away on their 70 year captivity in Babylon there were Cities around the area of Judah that went in a pillaged what was left of the city. Ezra refers to them as Samaritans. They were essentially Israelite outcasts that mixed with other tribes and intermarried with the Assyrians. At this point they were sneaky and sly in their attempts to infiltrate the Jews and their culture. In Ezra we read that they went to King Zerubbabel and offered to help them build the temple. And we think; "Oh, that's so nice. What a gracious offer." But King Zerubbabel saw right through their cunning attacks and replies:

"Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as **king Cyrus** the king of Persia hath commanded us." (Ezra 4:3)

This of course was upsetting to them so they tried another approach.

King Cyrus the great did not reign too much longer after his decree to let the Jews return and rebuild the temple. And the new King, King Artaxerxes didn't share the same passion for the Jews as Cryus did. So these Samaritans write him a letter and tell him all sorts of lies and false accusations about the Jews and admonish him to stop them from building a temple. And so he does. He allows the Samaritans to take their army up to Judah and force them to stop building the temple. They even hire Lawyers to tie this whole thing up in litigation for years.

Now it all makes sense. Before when we find out that they abruptly stopped the temple work I'm sure all sorts of things went through your mind as mine did, about how that was a poor choice. Accusing them of being lazy or selfish or any other number of things. But the fact of the matter is that an army stood there with weapons in hand ready to kill anyone that attempted to work on the temple. Along with the legal stuff that went with it. And maybe God had plans to save them from the Samaritans, but from what we read we would assume that their faith would not have allowed God to produce any sort of miracle. So they just put down their tools and walked away. So what do we learn from this?

Well, for me, it's easy to make snap judgments when I see someone or some situation. This last week some very generous friend donated 50 warm sweaters to the Elo Viz charity. And I had the opportunity to deliver those sweaters to a homeless shelter in downtown Salt lake. I'll tell you, walking into one of those places will change you. To sit down with some of them and look into their eyes. A flood of compassion will roll over you as it did me. What some of these people have gone through. The things that they have suffered is more than I could bear.

Though I don't like to admit it; there have been too many times that I made the choice not to like someone because of the judgment I cast on them only to find out after getting to know them that I do in fact love them in spite of their flaws and because of their journey. Life gives us all battle scars. Some are more severe than others. But we all have a burden that we have been called to bear.

I'd like to share a story with you that was given to me on my mission I couldn't find it online so I've scanned it in and have attached it with the manuscript of this podcast for your reverence:

- See attached story.

What this story and the book of Haggai teach us is that we dont really know what people are going through and the pain they have had to carry. During this Christmas season may we find it in our heart to treat others as if we already know their story. To love them for what they have had to go through even though we may never know what that is. We can trust that God has been involved in their journey and that the Master has them carefully in His hands molding them for His purpose. I promise you will find more joy and peace in your life if you see through those lenses.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Painting of the last supper

The story behind the painting of The Last supper is extremely interesting and instructive. Two incidents connected with this painting afford a most convincing lesson: the effects of thought in the life of a boy or girl, or a man or woman.

The Last Supper was painted by Leonardo Da Vinci, a noted Italian artist. The time engaged for its completion was seven years. The figures representing the Twelve Apostles and Christ himself were painted from living persons.

The live model for the painting of the figure of Jesus was chosen first. When it was decided that Da Vinci would paint this great picture hundreds and hundreds of young men were carefully viewed, in an endeavor to find the face and personality exhibiting innocence and beauty, free from scars and signs of dissipation caused by sin. Finally, after weeks of laborious searching a young man nineteen years of age was selected as a model for the portrayal of Christ. For six months Da Vinci worked on the production of this leading character of the famous painting

During the next six years Da Vinci continued his labor of his sublime work of art. One by one fitting persons were chosen to represent each of the eleven apostles, space being left for the painting of the figure representing Judas Iscariot as the final task of this masterpiece. This was the apostle, you remember, who betrayed the Lord for thirty pieces of silver, worth \$16.95 in our present-day currency

For weeks Da Vinci searched for a man with a hard callous face, with a countenance marked by scars, deceit, hypocrisy and crime. A face that would delineate a character who would betray his best friend.

After many discouraging experiences in searching for the type of person required to represent Judas word came to Da Vinci that a man whose appearance fully met the requirements had been found. He was in a dungeon in Rome, sentenced to die for a life of crime and murder. Da Vinci made the trip to Rome at once, and this man was brought out from his imprisonment in the dungeon and led out into the light of the sun.

There Da Vinci saw before him a dark. Swarthy man, his long shaggy and unkempt hair sprawled over his face. A face which portrayed a character of viscousness and complete ruin. At last the painter had found the person he wanted to represent the character of Judas in his painting

By special permission from the king. This prisoner was carried to Milan where the picture was being painted. For six months he sat there before Da Vinci at appointed hours each day. As the gifted artist diligently continued his task of transmitting to his painting this base character in the picture representing the traitor and betrayer of the Savior. As he finished his last stroke he turned to the guards and said, "I have finished, you may take the prisoner away." As the guards were leading their prisoner away, he suddenly broke loose from their control and rushed up to Da Vinci, crying as he did so "Oh, Da Vinci, look at me! Do you not know who I am?"

Da Vinci, with the trained eyes of a great character student, carefully scrutinized the man upon whose face he had constantly gazed for six months and replied; "No, I have never seen you in my life until you were brought before me out of the dungeon in Rome."

Then lifting his eyes towards heaven the prisoner said, "O, God, have I fallen so low?" Then turning his face to the painter he cried. "Leonardo Da Vinci, Look at me again. For I am the same man you painted just seven years ago as the figure of Christ!"