

THE BOOK OF HAGGAI
Lesson 4, Chapter 2 Continued

The Minor Prophets as a group were, barely a few decades ago, seen as an interesting historical record of the ancient times in which their prophecies were about Israel's future from their perspective, but in the past from ours, and little else. So, their relevance was seen as nil, and they were among the least studied of the 66 Bible books as they seemed to lack any application to a Believer's life. Today, however, this viewpoint needs to be re-examined. In the year 2024, as we see where this world stands... with its wars everywhere, unspeakable atrocities occurring constantly, rising godlessness and the shunning of morality as a Western cultural norm, suddenly what was predicted is hitting very close to home. But, will anyone even notice?

When we reopen these books to serious study, to our astonishment it looks very much today like it did so many centuries ago, only what was predicted is happening on a much larger scale than the prophets could have imagined. What Believer in God cannot wonder if the predicted end of the world as we have known it is finally upon us? The Book of Haggai, and then Zechariah, raises the alarm-level even further and, therefore, makes what is contained in them all the more relevant to us than ever before. Because that is the case, then how I will go about teaching this to you necessarily will involve a certain amount of exhortation to turn the knowledge you will gain into action you will take. Otherwise, knowing has no point to it. And, I promise you, as it always is with God, His Word can oftentimes make us uncomfortable, because it can be offending, convicting, and it requires us to face ourselves and then to change. Whether or not we embrace what we learn and make that required change is the bottom line.

We closed in Haggai chapter 2 last week with a discussion about what the biblical term "shaking" means when it applies to something rare and special that God does. This was in reference to Haggai 2 verses 6 and 7.

CJB Haggai 2:6-7 ⁶ For this is what ADONAI-Tzva'ot says: "It won't be long before one more time I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry

land; ⁷ and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasures of all the nations will flow in; and I will fill this house with glory," says ADONAI-Tzva'ot.

God shaking something happens when He brings about a massive change either through blessing or through chaos. The effected thing can be narrow in scope...like to a single place or people...or it can be all encompassing...like to the entire earth and even extending to all the known Universe. In the biblical record, there has been but one thing happen that is described as a "shaking" and that was when Yehoveh descended upon Mt. Sinai to give Israel His Torah. Exodus 19 describes it as a scene of thick smoke, lightning, thunder, a shofar blast coming from the sky that was so loud that it terrified the people, and the entire mountain shook violently. But, another shaking is prophesied to come, and it is to occur in a devastating fashion in the End Times. Notice the pattern. The first shaking was beneficial, the second shaking will be catastrophic. Thus, in light of this pattern, we have in Yeshua's first coming great benefit, but in His second coming great catastrophe. So, this second shaking will be when Yehoveh comes to judge the nations for their bad treatment of Israel. The motivating factor that will cause Yehoveh to shake the world is the nations' general disregard for God's laws and commands, given in the form of a covenant at that first shaking, and this because that disregard *is* the underlying reason for such dreadful treatment of His people, Israel.

This terrible shaking that the nations of the world are going to experience...which is God's furious wrath... doesn't have to be experienced by *all* people. A most welcome God-principle is that He does not punish the innocent along with the guilty. He also does not pour out His wrath upon the wicked and the righteous together; rather He makes a distinction. We see a prime example of this when Israel was in Egypt. God poured out His wrath upon Egypt, but He made a distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites who also lived there. He protected the Hebrews whom He set-apart from all others and deemed them as His righteous own. In another example of God making distinctions, in the New Testament we read about this mysterious happening that has come to be called The Rapture, in which in the End Times those whom God deems righteous will (in some way) be removed from this planet before He pours out His wrath upon everyone else. The Church... more precisely, the Constantinian Church... has long considered itself to be that righteous group that is going to be whisked away to

a safe place before God's shaking of the world and the cosmos begins. However, perhaps we need to rethink whether the Church as we have known it since the 300's A.D. is that group or assembly of Believers in Yeshua that the New Testament speaks about. That shaking is almost upon us, and each of us need to be sure just where we stand with God. If we are lacking, we need to know where the problem lies.

While, on the one hand, I don't want to get too preachy on what I'm about to say, on the other hand I don't think it can be said often enough because of the danger it exposes: the Church...in the sense of what I have labeled as The Constantinian Church... has always treated the Jews and now Israel badly. The reason for this bad treatment is that historically it has no regard for God's laws and commands (which are expressed nearly exclusively in the Law of Moses). In fact, the gentile Church formed by the Emperor Constantine and his Roman Bishops, has expressly abolished God's extensive series of laws and commands from its foundational faith principles, and demeans any Believer in Christ that attempts to follow them. Here's why I regularly bring this up: we can label ourselves in a way that defies what we actually are; or at least in a way that can be quite different from how God sees us. Often it is done in ignorance, which can put Believers in a very precarious situation... we are in a danger we ought to know about, but too often we do not, and so go merrily along assuming all is well.

Christ had this to say as He spoke to the crowds in the Sermon on the Mount.

CJB Matthew 7:13-14 ¹³ ***"Go in through the narrow gate; for the gate that leads to destruction is wide and the road broad, and many travel it; ¹⁴ but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it.***

Believing in some broad, but hazy and inclusive idea of the existence of God, or of a Savior, and the acceptance of any kind of faith as a good faith, is a delusion. The same goes for understanding who the historical, biblical Yeshua is, and what He taught when He was on earth versus the many contrivances taught in its place. Any old belief or understanding won't do. The road to become a member of the Kingdom of Heaven... which is the goal for why Messiah sacrificed His life and thus protects us from His Father's wrath... is narrow; few will choose it. And those who do find themselves on a hard road upon which we'll discover far fewer fellow

travelers than we might like to think we ought to. This reality tells us right away that the requirements and the degree of difficulty for one's entry into the Kingdom are steep; not cheap, and not easy. Yeshua's brother Jacob (in the modern-era New Testament his name is changed to James), makes a remark that chimes right in with, and perhaps further fleshes out, what Yeshua taught on this matter of belief and faith. James says:

CJB James 2: 17-20 ***17 Thus, faith by itself, unaccompanied by actions, is dead. 18 But someone will say that you have faith and I have actions. Show me this faith of yours without the actions, and I will show you my faith by my actions! 19 You believe that "God is one"? Good for you! The demons believe it too- the thought makes them shudder with fear! 20 But, foolish fellow, do you want to be shown that such "faith" apart from actions is barren?***

Often in the New Testament we are cautioned that declaring with our mouths that Christ is Lord is necessary, but it isn't enough. Knowing who God is, is one thing; but if God's Word is also not upheld in our lives, and if we don't display those instructions as what it is that informs and drives our choices and behavior, then God (in general) does not accept our declaration of faith in Him and His Son as sincere and therefore it is not valid for redemption and salvation. The reality is that none of us are perfect in this regard. We all harbor some doubts, we all sin, and we all have some amount of error in our lives about understanding and doing God's will. Yet, there exists some cosmic line in the sand, drawn by God, concerning our choices and behavior that only He knows exactly where that line is. It is a line whereby we are safe on one side, but not safe on the other. And, God is the judge of that; not me nor any other human. Where we each stand in relation to that line begins with our trust in Yeshua as Lord and Savior, but it doesn't end there. There is a standard of worship, behavior, and more that we are to adopt and maintain all of our lives. In fact, that standard is known and recognizable enough such that we are told in the Bible that we will recognize others (referring to other professed Believers) by their fruit... that is, by their works and deeds. So, although we're not the judges of it, who stands on which side of that line isn't necessarily entirely hidden to us despite what a person may say or believe about himself. Yeshua tells us how we can know. I think the following statement of His in Matthew is meant to first and foremost help us

self-evaluate to determine where we actually stand, and only secondarily helps us to determine where others might stand who also profess Christ.

CJB Matthew 7:16-23 ***¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruit. Can people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise, every healthy tree produces good fruit, but a poor tree produces bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, or a poor tree good fruit. ¹⁹ Any tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire! ²⁰ So you will recognize them by their fruit. ²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants. ²² On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?' ²³ Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!'***

These are Yeshua's recorded words, and not mine nor anyone else's opinions. To bolster what it is that I'm trying to say to you, there's two points I want to highlight. The first is what is meant by "On that Day". On that Day means the day of God's judgment. This is an End Times event, that no doubt begins with God's great shaking of the earth and the skies. It is the same as The Day of the Lord...Judgment Day. It is a terrifying day... the worst the world has ever known... when who we think we are runs headlong into what God says we actually are in His eyes, and the consequences of God's decision will determine our lives from that moment forward... permanently... for the better or the worse. The second point is, who are these workers of lawlessness and how do we recognize them... the ones that Yeshua said that even though they claim belief in Him, He doesn't recognize them as actually belonging to Him? Those that He refuses to recognize are those who bear bad fruit...their deeds and ways are bad even though the professed Believers He is talking about no doubt think them good... and the reason for this disconnect between what is believed and what is true is because (according to Yeshua) these particular Believers are "workers of lawlessness".

So, what makes these particular people lawless to God? Is this speaking about common criminals? And if so, whose laws are these people mocking and shunning? The Roman laws of New Testament times? How about for modern people. Is this referring to American law? European law? International law? The

only law that God and His Son care about is God's law, and that was handed down to us in the form of the Law of Moses. God won't be judging us based upon the laws of our own individual towns, states or nations... which are so vastly different from one another and built upon political theories, cultural traditions, and manmade agendas. We will be judged by God NOT according to our nations' law systems, but rather according to His. It is the disregard of His law system that makes a person a worker of lawlessness. So, what would **you** call those Christian denominations and their members that denounce the Law of Moses...the law system and moral code of right and wrong, good and evil, as given by The Father... as something dead and gone, or perhaps are only for the Jews but not for gentile Believers? It is the Law of Moses that informs us about who God is, what His requirements of us are, what kind of lifestyles we are to live, how we are to treat others and how to worship and obey Him; and without that we subconsciously construct our own God and Savior, as well as our own system of how it is that we are to believe and behave, which can be far from the truth. Enough said; I'll leave that with each of you to ponder.

One more thing about God shaking the earth and what it will result in. Among the nations of the world, and among the greatest of all the convulsions, will be political ones because these are the governments that lead every culture, society, and nation. In the Bible era the political systems of all settled nations were as monarchies. As we learn in following the courses of prophetic fulfillments, those fulfillments are always processes, and not just one immediate event that happens suddenly and then it's over. Matthew 24 explains that nations will rise against nations; this is the beginning of the End. We also read that when the nations gather against Israel, this hardly means that the world comes together in harmony to battle God's people. The world will come to exterminate Israel, but the nations will each come for differing reasons. In fact, with a careful Bible reading there seems to be a few different groups that will form, as allies, when they come to battle Israel. The world will not be unified except in their goal of eradicating God's people. Rather, each nation or group of nations will come for its own good reasons, and likely much of it will have to do with the hope of being the one to gain political and economic control of the region. And, as a result, their differences and competing desires will rise to the surface, and they will fight and annihilate each other as part of God's process that He has set into motion to destroy the nations.

Let's move on with Haggai verse 8, by re-reading from there to the end of chapter 2.

RE-READ HAGGAI CHAPTER 2:8 – end

Westerners can sometimes forget that for a monarch...especially for an ancient king... everything that exists in his kingdom or nation belongs to him. The people. The fields they farm. The animals they use for work and food. The trees in the forest. The money the people make. Every possession they have belongs to the king. Depending on the whim of a king, a little or much of these various things can be left in the hands of the people. When we read about God being a king in the Bible, we would do well to add the words "**like a king**". Certainly, the people of the biblical eras had a better grasp on what it meant to be ruled over by a king than we do, today. At the same time, we must be careful not to ascribe to God all the human attributes typical of the office of an earthly king. The Bible describing Him as a king is but a way for humans to employ our human vocabulary to understand God a little better and to grasp the great and absolute sense of His sovereignty. One of the main differences is that human kings are all about their own needs; while God has no needs.

Thus, when we read in verse 8 that Gods says that "the gold and silver are mine", it is to be understood in the way that ancient people understood kings. Since Yehoveh is figuratively speaking the king of the world, the Universe, and all things seen and unseen, then in the broadest sense it goes without saying that the gold and silver on the earth belong to Him. On a more local level, this verse also likely has in mind the various objects made of gold and silver that belong in the Temple, and that at one point much of the world's gold and silver will pour into Jerusalem to acknowledge God's ownership, and to be once again used in the Temple and its services.

Such a return of the Temple treasures, long ago looted by Babylon, and the replacement of some objects and furnishings that likely had already been melted down and used to add to a king's storehouse, is also a way of representing Yehoveh's return to Jerusalem because His sovereignty has been restored. So, while the statement that "the gold and silver are mine" is truth, a complimentary

truth is that God will return to Jerusalem and the Temple, and there will be worldwide acknowledgment that He is king above all kings, and so there will be an outpouring of the world's riches to Him.

Verse 9 speaks of glory in terms of how splendid the Temple will be. Clearly this is not the proper noun form of glory...that is, The Glory as a particular manifestation of God, because God's Glory attribute doesn't diminish and then increase again any more than does the Holy Spirit; but, the appearance of the splendor (glory in that sense) of the Temple does, and that is what the subject is. I imagine that in Haggai's mind, and others in his era that read this prophecy, thought God was talking about the Temple that was currently under construction. That would prove not to be so because this new Temple would be much more modest than the one it replaced... Solomon's. Rather, this prophecy continues to point towards an End Times Temple (but in truth there is not a consensus among scholars that this is the case). Some Bible scholars think that because once Herod the Great became king (centuries later), and he expanded and tremendously enhanced the existing and rather plain Temple building until it became regarded as a Wonder of the World that people came from far and wide to see, that this prophecy could still be referring to the rebuilt Temple of Haggai's urging. Others see it as I do: it can only be referring to Ezekiel's Temple... the so-called Millennial Temple... from where Yeshua shall rule and reign. A Temple that, as Ezekiel describes it, will far outshine even Herod's Temple at its greatest.

From "this place", we are told, God will grant **shalom**; well-being. We are not to understand the term "this place" as meaning "from this Temple" but rather as "from Jerusalem", the place where the Temple is located. And this **shalom**... this divinely caused well-being... will be cast first upon the long-suffering residents of Jerusalem, and then in time be extended to the entire world that will be under the rule of Yeshua.

In verse 10, we move on to the next in the series of prophetic visions given to Haggai. It occurred on the 24th day of the 9th month. The 9th month of the Hebrew calendar is Kislev...a time from about mid-November to mid- December. This was still during only the 2nd year of the reign of the Persian King Darius. So, this new prophecy came exactly 3 months from the day the Temple rebuilding project had resumed. The prophecy begins with a question Yehoveh says is to be asked of the

Levite Priesthood about the Torah... more specifically it is about the Laws of Moses. It is interesting how the type and form of this question will many years later be used as a kind of template by the Rabbis of the Synagogue system to elucidate teachings about Rabbinical Judaism. So, the question that is here asked of the Priests... who in Haggai's day were still the teaching authorities of religious matters... could legitimately be classified as Halakhah, even though the term Halakhah eventually morphed into meaning the instruction in Jewish religious practices and traditions that was done not by priests but rather by non-Levite religious authorities called Rabbis.

The question is quite specific and technical, and is contained in verse 12. Although it is often assumed that the question is about a priest carrying some meat by placing it in a fold of his garment, in fact it doesn't appear to be. It simply asks if "someone" is carrying it, which far more implies a non-priest... that is, a regular common Israelite. What is being carried is said to be holy, so this meat was an intended sacrifice that must have been on its way to the altar and had not yet been offered. It is a basic Torah principle about sacrificing that once the giver makes the mental determination to give something to God, on the spiritual plane the transaction has just occurred in the sense that whatever is to be sacrificed is immediately transferred to God's ownership. So, a worshipper that determines to offer something to God and then thinks he can change his mind, without consequence, is quite wrong. To now withhold that sacrifice is to rob from God. And because this is the case, then the sacrificial meat that is on its way to the altar has already been elevated by God to a holy status.

The question asked is: if the fold of this layperson's garment... the cloth where the holy meat is being carried... happens to touch some other food item like wine, or oil, is the holy status of the meat then essentially transferred from the meat, to the garment, and then from the garment to the other food items? In other words, can something that has indirect contact with something holy (as opposed to direct contact) itself become holy as a result? The answer some unnamed priest gives to this question is "no", it cannot. The first thing to notice is that, as we talked about in an earlier lesson, sacrificing was clearly happening at the Temple Altar, even though the Temple itself had not yet been rebuilt. This should not have been occurring.

Then in verse 13, a second question is asked. If that person carrying the meat is ritually unclean because of having touched a corpse, is that uncleanness transferred to the holy meat...even to the oil and the wine? NOT because of his garment touching the food, but because that person has directly touched each item. The answer is yes, the holy meat, oil and wine are now contaminated with impurity. Here we have direct contact occurring between that which is unclean (the person who touched a dead body) and that which is holy (the meat), as well as that which is common (the oil and the wine). As a reminder: something that has a status of common simply means it is not holy. There is nothing wrong with something being common, and as far as food is concerned, common food is perfectly fine to eat (that is, it is not on the prohibited list of edible items as found in Leviticus 11).

Let's take a minute to understand what is being contemplated and why it matters. A Torah principle is that, theoretically, both ritual impurity and holiness can be transmitted to something or someone else through touch. This can come from inanimate objects touching, or humans touching, or touching between humans and objects. Such a thing actually happened fairly regularly as concerns uncleanness. For instance, a dead mouse (an unclean thing) falls into an open jar of wheat. The wheat and even the jar now become unclean. By the same theory, something holy could accidentally touch something that is not holy, and that holiness could also be transferred. However, in practice, because this was an unauthorized transference of holiness (and, God alone authorizes what can be deemed holy), then should such a touching happen the unauthorized object is destroyed by God. We see a good example of this in the Torah, in Numbers 16.

In Numbers 16 we read of a Levite named Korah, who along with a couple of other fellows, leads a rebellion against Moses, Aaron, and the priests. His complaint is that other Levites... the clans of the non-priests, like his own... should also be allowed the privilege to burn incense before the Lord. In other words, these men were jealous that certain clans of the tribe of Levi had been set apart as priests and so could do service at the Tabernacle, but their own clans were not. So, Korah's band of rebels...about 250 strong... march up to the Tabernacle, each with their own incense pans, intent on offering incense to God putting coals into their pans to burn the incense. Those coals would have become holy to instantly make these rebels' incense pans holy because of such close

proximity to the Tabernacle. But, because God does not allow the unauthorized transfer of holiness, immediately He sends fire to destroy both the rebels and the pans. The rebels because they came too close to God's holiness (whose mere proximity would have transferred holiness to them), and the pans because they had holy coals placed in them, which, theoretically, now make the pans holy.

So, were the 2 questions asked really about quizzing the priests concerning holiness and uncleanness just to see if they knew the correct answers? Not at all. Rather, the questions are designed to teach an object lesson. The lesson is about the behavior of the Judean people. So, in verse 14, God sees the people as unclean, and this is because the Temple is still not rebuilt, even though some progress has been made. Therefore, the sacrifices that have been offered on the altar...probably for the past 15 years... have all been deemed unclean, and therefore unfit, so they are rejected. The returning Judeans had tried to create a shortcut. They were so anxious to start sacrificing again that they quickly restored the altar (because it was quick and cheap to do), but left the Temple building to languish (because it would be harder and require much more money to do it).

Earlier in today's lesson I spoke about the welcome God-principle that He does not punish the innocent along with the guilty, nor does He pour out His wrath upon the righteous together with the wicked. But now we are presented with a not-so-welcome God-principle. It is that uncleanness and defilement are so contagious that it can infect other things beyond themselves. To refuse to obey God in one area of our life (to sin) has the potential to contaminate our other activities, just the same way uncleanness works ritually. Sin not only makes us guilty, it makes us unclean. It seems to be a human attribute that we think we can compartmentalize our behavior such that the consequences of actions in one area of our life can be totally separated from actions in another area of our life. In fact, sometimes from an outward viewpoint, this can indeed be successful... at least for a while. But in God's eyes, it doesn't work that way. This principle was memorialized in the Law of Moses, and the Israelites well-understood it. That is why they were in such a rush to make their sacrifices and to immerse in order to regain their holy and clean status. Especially for those Judeans that had been hauled off to Babylon, living far from Jerusalem, they knew that when they were in a state of sin and impurity, it affected everything in their lives...or, at least, it

had the potential to do so... and up in Babylon they had no means to solve their dilemma. We modern Believers need to take this to heart. This principle didn't die on the cross along with Our Savior. We can't be dishonest in our business dealings but then expect our dealings with our spouse, our family and friends to go untainted. It might take some time for the bad effects to show up and transfer from one area of our lives into another, but at some point they will.

As regards the Judeans doing unauthorized sacrificing, what Haggai is addressing is cause and effect. Because the offerings to God were not accepted, then God's blessings on the Judeans were withheld. And what they did wrong was to avoid God's direction to rebuild the Temple because it wasn't going to be easy. Further, their sacrificing was not given in the right attitude, or motivation, and the Judeans were in a state of disobedience. From God's perspective, the people were spiritually unclean as a result.

There are so many benefits and joys to be had from God declaring us holy. But holiness always begins with obedience. The Judeans had the idea that since the very soil of their land was holy, and therefore whatever grew from it was holy. This is why in their time in Babylon they were convinced that even the produce they ate was unclean, and therefore they were unclean. However, that was a Tradition filled with error and not the biblical truth. The soil of Judah may have been holy in a sense. But, whatever grew upon it had not been rendered holy. Rather it was merely common. This goes back to the 1st question God asked the priests to answer: can something holy transfer it's holiness to something else, to which the practical effect requires the answer to be no. No special status rests upon the produce of the land. The blessing from God was not in a transference of holiness to the food it produced, but rather the blessing was in the form of the land producing abundantly for the people. The self-evident proof that God was withholding His blessing was in the lack of abundance. And, the withholding of the blessing was because the Judeans were disobedient in God's command to rebuild His Temple.

That's enough for today. We'll continue with chapter 2 next time.