

“CONSIDER YOUR WAYS”

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Haggai 1:1-7 says, “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 the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, 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. Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. 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. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways.” Twice in this opening passage of the Book of Haggai, God told His people, “*Consider your ways.*” This is an instructive phrase that applies to Christians today as it did to the Israelites in the time of Haggai the prophet.

Haggai and the rebuilding of the temple

Haggai the prophet lived during the time in which the remnant of Israel returned from their captivity in Babylon back to Jerusalem and the land of Canaan from which they had been removed some seventy years before. Cyrus the King of Persia had freed the Jews to return to their land during the first year of his reign. His proclamation also included the authorization to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Ezra 1:1-3 says, “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. *Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.*” Cyrus referred to the fact that God had charged him to rebuild the temple, a reference to the very specific prophecy made about him by Isaiah (see Isaiah 44:28-45:13). There, God even called Cyrus by name nearly 200 years before the prophecy was fulfilled! The Israelites went back and started the work on the temple (Ezra chapter 3). Then came persecution and discouragement. “*Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the*

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(continued)

reign of Darius king of Persia” (Ezra 4:4-5). After Cyrus was dead, these enemies wrote letters to the King of Persia, Artaxerxes, who commanded that the work on the temple be stopped, and so it was for about two years (Ezra 4:6-24). *“Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them. Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them”* (Ezra 5:1-2). Thus, in Haggai’s time, the Israelites had not been building the temple as they should and therefore needed to change their ways.

Necessary steps for spiritual growth

One of the great lessons from this study of Haggai is that it is necessary to first consider one’s ways before being able to actually change them. That is why God told them to consider their ways before telling them to finish the temple. The consideration of their ways had to come first. Psalm 119:59 says, *“I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.”* There is no way that we can change (turn) ourselves until we first examine ourselves and think on our ways. We need to seek to know ourselves as God knows us so that we can change (1 Cor 13:12). Lamentations 3:40 says, *“Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.”* In the New Testament, we are commanded, *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves”* (2 Cor 13:5). We should particularly examine ourselves when we take the Lord’s supper (1 Cor 11:28-32), but not only then. We must always come to the light of God’s word to have our deeds revealed to see whether or not they are according to God’s word (John 3:19-21). We must look at our inner man in the mirror of God’s word and then change whatever needs to be changed (Jas 1:22-25). Receiving correction is the pathway of understanding (Prov 9:6-9; 15:31-32; 19:25). If we are like the world and see all our ways as clean (Prov 12:15; 16:2; 21:2), the end of those ways is death (Prov 14:12; 16:25). Along these lines, Haggai the prophet told the people to honestly and sincerely consider what they had been doing wrong (not building the temple) so that they could change their ways and do God’s will (finish the temple). In this case, the people listened, repented, and did indeed change their ways and completed the task God had given them to do (Ezra 6:14-15). The question for us is, Are we considering *our* ways and making changes in our lives and growing spiritually as we should?