

# Haggai 2:3-9

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*The prophet Haggai continues with the second message. He urges the returning exiles of Judah to remain strong to rebuild the temple of the LORD. He tells them He will be with them and protect them. Ultimately, the LORD will fill the temple with glory and grant peace.*

In the previous section, the LORD spoke to Haggai a second time. He told the prophet to speak to the leaders of Judah (Zerubbabel and Joshua) and the remnant of the people (vv. 1–2). In the present section, He gave him the message, which began with three pertinent questions: *Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison* (vs. 3)?

The first question *Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory* challenged the Judeans to remember the former temple. The phrase *this temple in its former glory* refers to the splendor of the first temple, which King Solomon built around five hundred years earlier, in approximately 966 BC. According to 1 and 2 Kings, that building was magnificent. It was composed of “stone prepared at the quarry, and there was neither hammer nor axe nor any iron tool heard at the house while it was being built” (1 Kings 6:7). However, the Babylonians destroyed it some four hundred years later, in 586 BC. That is why the LORD asked His covenant people to rebuild it.

The clause *who is left among you* suggests that some returning exiles were not old enough to have seen the *former temple* before its destruction in 586 BC. Haggai received the divine message recorded in this book of Haggai some sixty-six years after the temple’s destruction, in 520 BC. So those elders who had the opportunity to see the *former temple* would have been up in years. But those who remembered were to reflect on its splendor, which leads to the second question: *how do you see it now?* (vs. 3).

The LORD asked those elders who saw the *former temple* to compare it with the new building. The second temple was less splendid than the first one. It could not hold the candle. Solomon’s temple was built with the finest craftsman at the peak of Israel’s prosperity (1 Kings 5:13-18). This reconstruction of the temple was apparently accomplished by a volunteer force from among the small “remnant” who returned to Judah, doing the best they could (Haggai 1:14).

It was not even close to the first temple in beauty, as the third question implies: *Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison?* (vs. 3). There was no point of comparison between the first and second temples.

The second building was but a pale reflection of the former. The book of Ezra states, “many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers’ *households*, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes” (Ezra 3:12). Their sobbing was hard to discern though, because it was mixed with the joyous

cheering of those who had not known the temple's previous splendor, and now were encouraged that the temple was finally being rebuilt.

The elders might have had mixed feeling as they rebuilt the temple. Their spirit was willing, but their flesh was weak (Matthew 26:41). Perhaps they were discouraged because they thought they would never achieve anything like the *former temple* again. But the LORD did not want His people to lose heart by comparing the two buildings, so He addressed them with words of comfort. He began with the political leader (Zerubbabel), then the religious leader (Joshua), and the people of Judah.

Haggai wanted them to take great hope that at a point in the future the temple would have even greater splendor than Solomon's temple, and be furnished by the nations of the earth. This takes hope, and courage.

His exhortation contains two parts. In the first, He exhorts them to take courage, '*But now take courage, Zerubbabel, declares the LORD, take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage, declares the LORD* (vs. 4).

In the second part, God will tell the people of Judah not to be discouraged at the comparatively shabby temple, because God will create a *latter temple* that *shall be greater than the former* (vs. 6).

The verb translated as *take courage* means "to be strong." It can refer to physical strength. For example, Joshua still felt *strong* despite his advanced age (Joshua 14:11). Someone can recover from an illness and regain his strength (Isaiah 39:1). The verb can also refer to enthusiasm or determination. In this context, it means dealing with challenges and bouncing back. For instance, Moses asked the Israelites to "be strong and courageous" and not be afraid of their enemies because the LORD was with them (Deuteronomy 31:6). This is the meaning intended here in Haggai. God encouraged the people to persevere in spite of this project not living up to past glories. This was a new day. And God judges based on faithfulness; He determines results.

Like Moses, Haggai had the same ministry of encouragement in his day. Twice during the command, the prophet added the formula, '*declares the LORD*' to add weight to his message. The Hebrew term translated as *LORD* is Yahweh, the self-existent and eternal God who revealed Himself to Moses out of the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). Thus, when the prophet read the formula to the people, they would remember the divine source of the message and obey its terms.

After telling them to *take courage*, God gives them a reason they can be unafraid, *and work, for I am with you* (vs. 4). The entire community of God's people was to remain strong as they rebuilt the temple of God. They were to exercise their freedom to choose, and get to *work*. God gave humans the freedom to make choices, but choices have consequences. Here God makes clear that the people should focus on their faithfulness to follow, not the immediate outcome of their efforts.

The people had previously stopped working on the building project when they faced opposition from their enemies. They left the temple desolate for approximately sixteen years while building

paneled homes for themselves (Haggai 1:4). God urged them to have a strong determination to complete the assigned task.

The reason the people should remain strong and *work* on the building project is given in the remaining part of the verse: *For I am with you* (vs. 4). The Suzerain God reassured His covenant people of His protective presence. This is important, given that they were a defeated people, under the supervision of the mighty Persian Empire.

They had no strength apart from God's provision. In Ezra, we learn that God made provision for His people through the protective order of King Cyrus of Persia, whom scripture calls, by name, "My shepherd" (Isaiah 44:28). Isaiah spoke this prophecy centuries prior to Cyrus's birth. God prepared Cyrus to protect His people. But first He asked His people to take action based on faith in His word.

God's promise *For I am with you* served to encourage the people to work on the building project. They did not have to be afraid of their enemies because the LORD their God is all-powerful. His active presence among His people would bring the project to fruition. In essence, the LORD said to His covenant people and their leaders, "Hang in there! I will hold you by the hand and will guide you in all your ways. Just trust Me!"

After telling the people of Judah that God would be with them, Haggai added the prophetic formula to let them know that the message did not come just from him. This time, however, instead of the statement—*declares the LORD*—the prophet said: *declares the LORD of hosts* (vs. 4).

The term translated as *hosts* is "sabaoth" in the Hebrew language. It means "armies" and often refers to the angelic armies of heaven (1 Samuel 1:3). The phrase *the LORD of hosts* occurs with great frequency in the prophetic books. Often, it describes God's power as a warrior leading His angelic army to defeat His adversaries (Amos 5:16; 9:5; Habakkuk 2:17). Here in Haggai, the phrase demonstrates God's power as the supreme warrior who has complete control over all human affairs. The all-powerful God is the warrior par excellence. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He has the power to protect the Jewish people as they accomplish the work of rebuilding the temple. His covenant people could stand fast in the face of opposition because of God's provision.

The LORD through Haggai continued to reaffirm His presence among His covenant people. This time, He drew a parallel between the rebuilding of the temple and His active presence among the Israelites during the wilderness journey. We read, *As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst* (vs. 5).

The verb translated as *made* in the phrase *the promise which I made you* is "to cut." It is often used in contexts where God makes a covenant with His people (Genesis 15:9–10). This likely refers to the ancient practice of "signing" a covenant by cutting a carcass in half and walking between it (Genesis 15:9-10).

The idea was for the agreeing parties to pass between the halved carcass and acknowledge, “Thus shall it be done to me if I fail to keep my agreement with you.” The emphasis is that God will keep His promises that He made in His covenant with Israel. This included a promise to restore Israel to the land after they had broken the covenant and been scattered among the nations of the earth (Deuteronomy 30:1-3). When God made His covenant with Abraham, He walked through the halves of the carcass as God (a smoking oven) and as a descendant of Abraham, Jesus (a flaming torch)—([See commentary on Genesis 15:17-21](#) ).

The term *Spirit* in the phrase *My Spirit is abiding in your midst* refers to God’s presence. The participial form of the verb “to abide” (*is abiding*) suggests a continuous or permanent event. At the time of Israel’s wilderness crossing, the Suzerain (ruler) God promised to be present with them (Exodus 33:14). Here in Haggai also, He would be present with the Judeans as they rebuilt His temple. The point of comparison is clear: The LORD brought His covenant people back from Babylon as He had brought them back from Egypt. This was so because He bound them with the same covenant agreement. God is unchanging. He is faithful. He will always keep His covenant promise.

When the *Spirit* of God is at work in people’s lives, He empowers them to accomplish great things. For instance, for construction of the wilderness tabernacle the LORD called Bezalel by name and “filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge,” enabling him to do “*all kinds of craftsmanship*” (Exodus 31:1–3). Here also in Haggai, the *Spirit* of God (His presence) would fill the returning exiles to empower them to complete the building project. That is why He said to them, *Do not fear!* The people did not have to be afraid of any enemy because the LORD their God is the great warrior.

The prophet Haggai, not wanting the returning exiles to miss the source of his message, repeated the formula, *For thus says the LORD of hosts* (v. 4). Doing so would prevent the people of Judah from forgetting the divine origin of the message. It would also prevent them from taking the message lightly.

God now moves from exhorting the people to take courage, to assuring them they should not despair that this temple is inferior to Solomon’s temple. This is because in the future, God will conquer the nations (like Babylon, who destroyed this temple) and build a temple even grander than Solomon’s temple.

After the formula of *thus says the LORD*, Haggai quoted God’s words directly, which begin with the double temporal phrase, *Once more in a little while* (vs. 6). The phrase *once more* assumes that the action in view had taken place previously. The phrase *in a little while* suggests that God’s intervention was imminent; that is, it could happen at any time. It gave the prophet’s listeners imminent hope. However, in hindsight we know this prophetic fulfillment is yet in the future, as of this writing.

After the temporal phrase, the LORD declared, *I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land* (vs. 6). The term *shake* occurs frequently in the Old Testament. It is used as a noun in the book of Amos to refer to an earthquake as a natural phenomenon (Amos 1:1). In Psalm 60, it is used as a verb to depict the destruction that occurred after Israel’s military

defeat: “You have made the land quake, You have split it open” (Psalm 60:2). Here in Haggai, the verb translated *going to shake* is a participle in the Hebrew text. It suggests that a number of shakings will continue to occur until the time when God restores His creation.

The *heavens and the earth* represent everything that exists in the universe (Genesis 1:1). But the prophet added the phrase *sea and dry land* to give more details about *the earth*. In so doing, He underscored the scope of the divine intervention. That means that everything would be affected. Nothing would be left out.

God would *shake* His entire creation. The nations that stand against His people in this small episode of rebuilding the temple are apparently a symbol of the nations standing against His people over time. At the end of this age, the nations will gather at Armageddon to assault Jerusalem, and God will protect His people and destroy their armies (Revelation 19:19). After this time, a new temple will be built (Ezekiel 40-45:9).

Haggai continued with the theme of divine intervention and said, *I will shake all the nations* (vs. 7). The term *nation* refers to the Gentile ethnic groups. God would cause political upheavals among all the Gentile *nations*. God will conquer these nations.

As a result, *they will come with the wealth of all nations* to bless Israel, and adorn its temple (vs. 7). The term *wealth* can be translated as “treasures” or “riches.” The tumult of nature caused by the LORD would cause *all* the Gentile *nations* to bring their treasures to adorn the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. It seems likely this prophecy will be fulfilled during the thousand year reign of Christ on this earth, when a new temple is constructed in Jerusalem, as described by the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40-46). (As an aside, Haggai 2:6-7 is included as a part of the lyrics of Handel’s Messiah.)

Having told His people that the Gentile nations would bring treasures to the temple, the LORD declared, *I will fill this house with glory*. The term *glory* refers to the visible presence of the LORD. That means that His presence would be manifest in the temple. The prophet Haggai repeated the formula, *Says the LORD of hosts* to remind his audience that he was merely a messenger sent by God (v. 4; v. 6). God, not Haggai, was the authority behind the message.

That *the LORD* would *shake all the nations* to cause them to bring their treasures to His temple demonstrates He is all-powerful. After all, He is the maker and owner of everything. Thus, in anticipation of the splendor of the coming rebuilt temple, He exclaimed, *The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine declares the Lord of hosts* (vs. 8).

A literal translation of the verse is: “To Me the silver; to Me the gold.” The prepositional phrase “to Me” is placed first for emphasis in both cases. Through this verse, the LORD made it clear that He had the right to take the riches of the nations because He is the ultimate owner of everything. God is the one who gives treasures to people and nations as He sees fit. Everything belongs to Him (Psalm 50:10). Thus, He has the right to give and take away (Job 1:21). In due time, God will see that silver and gold makes its way back to His temple to restore its *glory*.

The Bible frequently refers to *silver and gold* because they are valuable and durable metals. It often mentions them when speaking about wealth and something precious. The LORD blessed Abram with a great deal of “livestock, silver, and gold” (Genesis 13:2). Similarly, He rewarded Solomon with riches. During Solomon’s reign, “he made *silver and gold* as plentiful in Jerusalem as stones” (2 Chronicles 1:15; 1 Kings 10:27). King Solomon even used them in fabricating the appurtenances of the temple (1 Kings 6–7). When he completed the building project, he “brought in the things dedicated by his father David, the *silver* and the *gold* and the utensils, *and* he put them in the treasuries of the house of the LORD” (1 Kings 7:51).

Unfortunately, when the Babylonians invaded Judah in 586 BC, they “took away the bowls, the firepans, the basins, the pots, the lampstands, the pans and the drink offering bowls, what was fine *gold* and what was fine *silver*” (Jeremiah 52:19). The people of Judah remembered all *the silver and gold* of the first temple.

Those who were sad at the state of this restored temple, as compared to the splendor of Solomon’s temple, were sad in thinking they could no longer build another temple with these precious treasures. But God was telling His people that He owns all *gold* and *silver*. He would shake the nations to bring their wealth to the subsequent temple.

After stating that *silver and gold* belong to the LORD, Haggai added the prophetic formula *declares the LORD of hosts* to reinforce the divine nature of his message.

He then encouraged the people of Judah as they continued to work on the *temple* by telling them that ‘*the latter glory of this house will be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts.*

This prophecy cannot be fulfilled in the new earth, for when the current earth is burned with fire and replaced by a new heaven and earth, there will be no temple building, as God will dwell among humans on earth in His full glory, and will Himself be the temple (Revelation 21:22).

A possible fulfillment for this future *greater* temple’s construction is during the time of Jesus when King Herod massively expanded the temple. But the renovation for Herod’s temple was financed by Herod and Rome extracting resources from God’s people, rather than the nations bringing resources to Jerusalem to supply the temple. So although Herod’s temple was a great work of architecture, it does not seem to fit this prediction.

This prophetic prediction seems most likely to occur during the thousand-year reign of Christ on this earth (Revelation 20:2-4). This seems to match the prophecy by Ezekiel as well (Ezekiel 40-46).

To read more about the Temple in Jerusalem, please read [our Tough Topics article: The Temple](#).

The elders who saw the former temple thought the new temple was inferior, and were disappointed. It seemed to them “like nothing in comparison” (Haggai 2:3). They even “wept with a loud voice” after laying the foundation of the new temple (Ezra 3:12). But God wanted them to have hope, because they could trust that something even greater was coming.

God had a plan in mind. He promised to bring the wealth of the nations to the temple, helping it to achieve a splendid beauty. Although this is still in the future as of this writing, it is as certain as any prediction that has already been fulfilled. God promised to dwell in the new temple amid His people. For this reason, His people could find hope and comfort as they sought to complete the building project. Ezekiel 43:1-5 predicts a return of God's visible glory to His temple, and seems a likely fulfillment of this prediction.

The prophet closed this section by reporting what the LORD had said, '*In this place, I will give peace,*' declares the LORD of hosts (vs. 9). The term *place* probably refers to the city of Jerusalem, not just the *temple*. The term translated as *peace* is "shalom" in Hebrew. It means good health, well-being, and abundant life. It speaks of wholeness. Haggai told the Judeans that God promised to grant them material and spiritual blessings. He repeated the formula *declares the LORD of hosts* to remind his audience that he was not the primary author of the message; God was the primary author. The phrase *LORD of hosts* could be translated "LORD of armies" and refers to God's power and authority. During Christ's thousand-year reign upon the earth there will be *peace* and restoration not only to Jerusalem, but also to all creation. As predicted in Isaiah:

"And the wolf will dwell with the lamb,  
And the leopard will lie down with the young goat,  
And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;  
And a little boy will lead them.  
Also the cow and the bear will graze,  
Their young will lie down together,  
And the lion will eat straw like the ox.  
The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,  
And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.  
They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,  
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
As the waters cover the sea."  
(Isaiah 11:6-9)

### **Biblical Text**

<sup>3</sup> 'Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison?' <sup>4</sup> But now take courage, Zerubbabel,' declares the Lord, 'take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage,' declares the LORD, 'and work; for I am with you,' declares the Lord of hosts. <sup>5</sup> 'As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!' <sup>6</sup> For thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. <sup>7</sup> I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. <sup>8</sup> 'The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,' declares the LORD of hosts. <sup>9</sup> 'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and in this place I will give peace,' declares the LORD of hosts."