**Lesson 23**

**21-22 March 2022**

**Genesis 48-50**

***Another Perspective*: Haggai**

**Timeline and Map** – Haggai is minor prophet number 9 on the timeline, so write his name on the ninth blank. His book is one of the few for which the exact date can be given. He says that the word of the Lord came to him “in the second year of King Darius,” which was 520 b.c. He lived and worked in Jerusalem, so draw a little stickman near Jerusalem on your map and label it with his name. Leave room for another stickman near Haggai, because he and Zechariah lived and worked in Jerusalem at the same time.

**Some Background –** In order to understand Haggai’s book, we need some background on what was happening in Israel. I have a new timeline for you that shows some of the major events the Israelites of Haggai’s time would have known about. They certainly knew that the kingdom of Judah had been conquered by Babylon 60-some years earlier. They also were aware that Babylon had subsequently been conquered by King Cyrus the Great of Persia within fifty years of Judah’s fall. And they were very much aware that King Cyrus had issued a decree very soon after he took control that allowed exiled peoples in his kingdom to return to their native lands—which meant that the exiled Jews in Persia could return to Israel if they so desired. We pick up on this part of the story in Ezra chapter one. Ezra chapter two lists all the people who returned to Israel at that time, and we pick up the story again in chapter three. Chapter four tells about the strong opposition against the building of the temple. Note especially verses 4-7. The opponents to the rebuilding didn’t get anywhere while King Cyrus was in power because he had ordered the temple to be rebuilt and made provision for it. But every time a new king came into power, the opponents renewed their attack, and they were finally successful when King Artaxerxes began his rule. If you look at the new timeline, you see that nothing more was done toward finishing the temple for ten years. Then enter Haggai and Zechariah! We read about them in Ezra 5:1-2. Notice that the opposition did not stop, however. When the next new king of Persia came to power (Darius), the adversaries sent him a letter of complaint. Darius was shrewd enough to do his own investigating (see Ezra 6:1-5) and he found that the Jews were doing exactly what his predecessor, King Cyrus, had commanded. So he sent a very strong reply to the opponents, not only ordering that the temple work proceed but that they pay for it!

**Haggai’s Messages –** Years ago, when I was going through the book of Ezra, I was very intrigued by verses 14 and 15 of chapter 6. I wondered just what Haggai and Zechariah had said that made such a big difference in the attitudes of these exiles. It was like the exiles completely changed overnight when they heard Haggai and Zechariah preach. So let’s turn now to Haggai and examine what he had to say.

* Haggai chapter one contains a message for the two *leaders* of the exiles: the governor (Zerubbabel) and the high priest (Joshua—NOTE: this is *not* the “Joshua” of Moses’ day. This Joshua is called Jeshua in the book of Ezra). They in turn would pass the message on to all the rest of the people under their authority. The people had been experiencing very poor harvests, so God told them why. He said that He is the One who ruined their harvests “because My house still lies in ruins, while each of you is busy with his own house. So *on your account* the land has withheld its crops.” Note their response to this message, in verses 12-15.
* About one month later Haggai brought a second message from the Lord, found in Haggai 2:1-9. In this message the Lord gives strong encouragement to people who are working on a big project in the midst of their enemies and who are discouraged when they see how inferior the current temple is to the temple that King Solomon had built.
* Two months after that Haggai received a third message, telling the people to particularly note “this day”, meaning the day Haggai received and delivered the message. God tells them that from this day forward the drought and famine are over, because they have taken to heart what God has told them and have begun working diligently on the temple again. From this day on, they will see the blessing of God on their crops.
* Haggai’s last message is meant for Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah. Zerubbabel was of royal descent, i.e. he was the heir to the Davidic throne of Israel. If Judah had not fallen, he might well have come back to Israel as “*King* Zerubbabel”, not “Governor Zerubbabel”. So God sends him a very personal word of encouragement. He tells him that someday He is going to shake up all kings and nations and remove them from power so that He can set His own king in place. And at that time He says, “I will take you, Zerubbabel, My servant, and make you like My signet ring, for I have chosen you.” (A king’s signet ring is a symbol of his authority. Remember that Pharoah gave Joseph his signet ring, symbolizing that he was transferring his power to Joseph.)

**A Stirred Spirit –** We have seen this phrase used a number of times in both Ezra and Haggai. It is a reminder that God is the One at work behind the scenes, causing people to intensely desire to do what He has decreed should happen. We are told that “the *Lord* stirred up the spirit of…”

* Cyrus – Ezra 1:1
* everyone who wanted to return to Israel – Ezra 1:5
* Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and all the remnant – Ezra 1:14
* Darius – Ezra 6:14 – Note: Even though we do not find this particular phrase in verse 14, we are clearly told that the returned exiles “finished their building *by decree of the God of Israel* and *by decree of…Darius*.” It is evident that God was ultimately behind Darius’ making his decree.



***Bible Study Fellowship’s Perspective:*** *The following comments were taken from Lesson 28 of the BSF course on Genesis.*

**Joseph Expanded Pharaoh’s Power –** [Joseph’s] policy and the government purchase of land centralized resources and met the people’s basic needs. **These seemingly harsh measures revealed a desperate plan for mutual survival.** Similar to a feudal system of land tenure, the government possessed the land. There was no private ownership by individuals. Joseph did not leave the people powerless or without honorable work. Egyptians were given seed with the command that one-fifth of all crops produced from this seed would revert to Pharaoh. Joseph established this practice as a law that stood for hundreds of years. This new law strengthened Egypt as a society.

Joseph’s methods of administration have sometimes been criticized. Did he take advantage of adverse conditions to build up power for Pharaoh’s throne? **The Bible describes Joseph’s economic policy with neither approval nor criticism.** However, Joseph’s unswerving purpose, personal integrity and humane administration can be noted…Joseph’s measures upheld the common good. Control of the land allowed regulation of water usage, providing equitable distribution of water for irrigation and food for survival…There is no hint that Joseph profited personally from this situation. On the contrary, the people expressed only gratitude. They said, “You have saved our lives” (Genesis 47:25). The tax of a fifth of the land’s produce was not excessive according to the standards of that day. page 2

**Jacob’s Blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh –** In the line of God’s people, the firstborn inherited three important rights—the priesthood, the kingship in regard to the family, and the double inheritance. Jacob did not impart all three on Joseph and his sons. Joseph received only the double portion of the inheritance as his two sons were adopted as Jacob’s own. Jacob…received spiritual illumination concerning God’s purpose and place for each member of the family. In Genesis 49, the headship or kingship was given to *Judah*…from whom the Messiah came. The priesthood was given to *Levi*. pg 4-5

**Jacob’s Final Days –** Jacob ended his life full of thankfulness to God and aware of God’s undeserved goodness to him. His final words reveal faith in God and His unshakeable promises. Jacob’s life had moments of victory and moments of intense trials, but God’s steadfast work in his life remained evident. **God blesses His people by arranging their lives to accomplish His purposes.** page 5