

Haggai chapters 1 & 2

Many years ago, I was a deacon in a local church. There were about 80 church members. At that time, the members prayed about church expansion and planned to buy a church building. The pastor emphasized that a church expansion must go with spiritual revival first or at the same time. Only members that are spiritually committed to God can lead to physical expansion that is pleasing to God. The pastor led the group to expand mission supports and member spiritual revival while searching for a building. Then, the church purchased a church building that can host 400 attendees that has a large fellowship hall, 8 Sunday school classrooms and 3 pastors offices. That was a large financial commitment for an 80 members church, however, only spiritual commitment can lead to financial commitment. Praise God that the church members grew a lot after the church building purchase and were fully paid off after several years. Reading the book of Haggai reminded me of this church building purchase and church growth experience.

Haggai is a minor prophet book in the Old Testament. This book was written in 520 B.C. when the Persians had overthrown the Babylon. After 70 years of captivity, Persian king Cyrus issued a decree (538 B.C.) to allow the Jews to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. This fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah. About 50,000 Jews were returned to the Israel land under the leadership of Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel and the people quickly built a foundation for the new temple. Non-Jewish settlers in the area and neighboring groups (Ezra 4) opposed the temple rebuild project, and the work stopped for about 16 years. Few Persian kings were replaced and Darius the Great became the King. He supported the Jews and allowed the temple rebuild to resume. Haggai spoke to the Jews who have returned to the land, and urged them to complete the Temple as its foundation was laid eighteen years ago. Haggai delivered God's message twice that year (chapter 1 and 2). People responded to God's calling through Haggai.

1) Call to join the rebuild of the temple

The people at that time were concerned about their own welfares. Haggai 1:4 states "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" Haggai 1:9 states "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house." The temple was not built but

people's houses were well built. Haggai 1:6 states "You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough...." The people are concerned about their personal lives and material pursuits can not satisfy them. They are away from God. They need to have spiritual revival.

2) Stir up our spirit for the temple

Haggai 1:13-15 described God's action on the rebuild of the temple. The first part of the message on verse 13 is "I am with you". Even though the people's hearts are away from God at that time, but God was with them. God want us to be close to Him although He is always with His people. Today, many people are also busy on their personal physical well being and put God in low priority. Verse 14 mentions God stirred up the spirit and hearts of the leaders as well as all the people. Spiritual revival requires our desires to seek and God will draw you closer to Him (Matt. 7:7, Jere. 29:13). When we seek God and close to Him, we automatically fear Him as stated in Haggai 1:12.

3) God's temple today

The physical temple was completed few years after God's calling through Haggai. Today in the New Testament period, God is clear about His temple is our spirits. "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple." I Cor. 3:16-17. Growth of God's temple refers to more people turn back to Jesus Christ and accept Him as savior. Mission and evangelism require us to put top life priority with Christ and to fear Him. God is with us same as the time of Haggai.

Looking back to the local church building purchase years ago and the growth of members, it was really a result of spiritual revival and dedication. Having a church building itself does not necessary means members will grow.

In conclusion, are you going to join the rebuild of the temple if you are at the time of Haggai? In another word, are you going to be part of the "God's temple expansion" movement today as stated in Matt. 38:19-20? Luke 15:10 states "In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents.", and this "expansion" brings glory to God.