

Lesson for April 5, 2009

Old Testament Survey

The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi

The Book of Haggai

Haggai was a prophet of the restored remnant after 70 years of captivity by Babylon. Now Israel was back in her native land and Haggai's message concentrated on the rebuilding of the Temple. The Temple was the spiritual focal point for the nation of Israel. With the Temple restored, Temple worship would also be restored.

Haggai's message to the restored remnant was to stop concerning themselves about becoming comfortable in their own dwellings, but rather begin the task of rebuilding God's Temple. Four years after Haggai began his ministry, the Temple was completed and dedicated.

God has always promised to provide our daily needs for food, clothing and shelter according to Matthew 6:25-34. Where God guides He also provides. We saw this principle when we studied the story of the children of Israel in the wilderness and how they grumbled at the provisions of God. God continued to provide for Israel's every need. (Exodus 16) We also saw this principle when we studied the names of God in the Old Testament, such as, Jehovah-jireh (God provides). The grace provision of God for the Church Age believer includes all that is necessary for life support. (Matthew 6:11, 25-34; Philippians 4:4,19; Hebrews 1:14; Romans 13:4; John 10:28; Romans 8:38-39)

The Book of Zechariah

Zechariah was also a prophet to the restored remnant after the captivity and a contemporary to Haggai. Both prophets worked together to achieve the rebuilding of the Temple. Within the prophecies of Zechariah there are both advents of Jesus Christ as Messiah. More than any other minor prophet, Zechariah prophesies about the Messiah. Zechariah saw the Gentile nations who opposed Israel destroyed, Jerusalem and the Temple restored and Messiah revealed.

The first six chapters of Zechariah reveal both the first coming of Jesus Christ and the second coming of Jesus Christ. The first time Christ came and revealed Himself to Israel, they were blinded to His presence among them. He was ultimately rejected as Messiah by Israel, as He is today. However, Zechariah also revealed the Second Coming of Jesus Christ when Israel as a nation will recognize Jesus Christ as Messiah.

Prophecies regarding Jesus Christ were given thousands of years before He appeared on the scene as a man, so that the Jewish nation, God's chosen people, would recognize Him and embrace His arrival. Because of their blindness, the Jewish nation rejected their Messiah and ultimately had Him crucified as a criminal. Had the chief priests of Christ's day understood the prophecies concerning their Messiah, they would have recognized Him and acknowledged Him as Messiah.

Revelation 19:11-16 describes the Second Coming of Jesus Christ at the end of the Tribulation. There is no question that Jesus Christ will come to execute judgment upon the remaining satanic forces, which include unbelievers. The description of the Person on the white horse is clearly a description of Jesus Christ – faithful, true, righteous judge, eyes of fire, crowns on His head, the name written that no man could understand, clothed in a robe dyed by dipping it in blood and His name is called the Word of God.

Jesus will come with His armies of believers and angels clothed in fine, clean, white linen and they will also be riding white horses. Ready for war, Jesus Christ need only speak the word and nations will be destroyed. He will come to execute the wrath of God through fierce battle. And, He will destroy His enemies with a rod of iron and tread them down in battle. He is the Kings of kings and the Lord of lords and no one can stand against Him.

The Book of Malachi

Malachi prophesied to the restored remnant in the time of Nehemiah. His message was one of God's love for His people, rebuke for their disobedience and hope for the future. Malachi's rebuke was not only directed toward the people, he also included the priests. The priests had corrupted the rituals by offering sacrifices of unclean animals. This was a direct violation of God's instructions to Levi and it appears that the priests were knowingly doing this. The people were also bringing less than the best of their flocks to God. This entire ritual was to be a teaching aid for the people by the priests with regard to the coming Messiah. The Messiah would be sinless and this was what the animal sacrifice represented. God's question to the people and the priests was "why do you rob me?"

Malachi also prophesied both comings of the Lord and adds a prophecy regarding two forerunners to His comings. Before Christ's first coming, God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way by preaching the Gospel. Before Christ's second coming, God will send Elijah to prepare the way by preaching the Gospel. (Many believe that Elijah and Moses will be the two witnesses spoken of in Revelation who preach the Gospel).

Malachi 3:10, has been used by many preachers to teach tithing (ten percent of your income). As we have studied, tithing was an income tax of sorts for the entire nation of Israel (believer and unbeliever alike). By examining the context of the passage it becomes clear that God required a tithe in order to keep the coffers of the nation full. This included food storage, as well as money. Also notice that God mentions that Israel had robbed Him in tithes and *offerings*.

In order to properly understand *giving* you must first understand dispensations. A dispensation is a period of time in which God deals with mankind in a certain way to administer His policies. Each dispensation, therefore, has unique characteristics, as well as certain similar functions. Such is the case with giving. In the dispensation in which we live, called the Age of Grace or the Church Age, giving is both different and the same as in the Age of Israel (Old Testament).

Giving is not tithing. Failure to distinguish between the two indicates a person does not know God's Word and has failed to recognize the differences between the Age of Israel and the Church Age. Giving has always been a legitimate function for the believer, but tithing is ONLY for Israel in the Old Testament. (Leviticus 27:30-34; Malachi 3:10)

The tithe was a form of taxation for Jewish believers and unbelievers alike. The word means "a tenth." There were several tithes that were levied upon the Jewish citizen: maintenance of the Levites (priests), for national feasts and sacrifices, and for the poor. (Numbers 18:21,24; Deuteronomy 14:22-29)

Giving went beyond the requirement to pay a tithe (tax) because it involved the free will of the giver. *Properly motivated giving involves a willingness to honor God with the provisions He has given to us.* Unlike the tithe, which was a violation of the law if not obeyed, giving was voluntary. When properly motivated by a desire to bring glory to God, the believer voluntarily gave over and above the required tithe (offerings in Malachi 3:10).

In the Church Age we have no such tithing requirement. We no longer have a Levitical priesthood; all believers are priests. National feasts and sacrifice worship have ceased and the local church is supposed to take care of its poor. Grace giving by the believer, with the proper mental attitude, will reflect God's "grace giving" toward him. In other words, the believer with the right mental attitude will use the blessings that God has bestowed upon him to support God's work. II Corinthians 8-9 gives us a list of principles with regard to our responsibility of supporting the ministry.

The message throughout the Old Testament is hope for Israel. The Hebrew word for hope is “miqveh,” like its Greek counterpart “elpis,” means total confidence and anticipation with joy. The “hope” for Israel and the Church is the same – Jesus Christ.

Israel hoped for the coming of Messiah Jesus Christ and anticipated that He would put down their enemies and set up His millennial kingdom. Unfortunately, Israel failed to recognize their Messiah and had him put to death. What they had failed to realize was that His first coming was to make the ultimate sacrifice for their sin, though it was clearly spoken of by the prophets of God.

For Church Age believers, Jesus Christ is the revealed Messiah. The Church is anticipating the return of Christ at the Rapture. The Rapture takes place at the end of the Church Age and includes all believers alive at that time. This will be the time when all believers alive when He returns meet Him in the air and are lead to Heaven. The Church Age believer also anticipates the Second Coming of Christ when we return with Him to earth in our glorified bodies to defeat His enemies and rule with Him for 1000 years.

Many children of Israel (Jews) who have lived or are living in the Church Age have believed in Jesus Christ as their Messiah (Savior) and as such become members of the body of Christ along with Gentile believers.