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The Key to Covenant Blessing

Haggai 2:10-19

Psalm 92 contains a description of a healthy, robust Christian.

Psalm 92:12-14, "The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree, he will grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still yield fruit in old age; they shall be full of sap and very green..."

What a vivid description of what we in Christ can be:

- Flourishing like the palm tree: speaks both of glory and gracefulness.
- [Being] like a cedar in Lebanon: a picture of strength and majesty!
- Flourishing: speaks of the growing season in which a flowering tree sends out countless buds!
- Yielding fruit in old age: speaks of never burning out (cf. (Deuteronomy 34:7).
- [Being] full of sap and very green: speaks of ultimate health, vitality, and richness.

This is what I want to be as a child of God today... tomorrow... and throughout my life! The tendency with age is to grow stiff, hard, and brittle. Physically that may occur in my body, BUT God forbid that should occur in our walks with Christ! As we age, we should want to grow soft, tender, and supple — always being vigorous in our love and worship of the Lord!

Such spiritual flourishing can happen to each one of us. In fact, it must happen! Yet how does it happen? Haggai answers that question as he focusses on the key to covenant blessing — a key which if utilized throughout our lives will keep us strong in the Lord!

This is the fourth oracle of this prophecy which was given to the people of God in 520 BC when their zeal and fervor for God had waned.

Recall, in 538 BC, Cyrus gave the order for God’s people to return home and rebuild the temple. And the creme of the crop — the spiritually zealous — responded and 42,360 Jewish servants of the Lord moved to Palestine. Yet when they arrived, it was anything but encouraging!

- The state of the temple alone was incredibly disappointing.
- Add to that persecution arising from the local rabble.
- And then mix in a 17-year drought in which God’s people suffered greatly

And you have all the makings for disappointment, disillusionment, and grief.

Accordingly, God raised up at this time two prophets, Zechariah and Haggai. As we have seen, God used Haggai to initiate a revival on account of which they labored diligently on the temple of the Lord. And Haggai addresses the blessing that came as a result! From this we learn, “The Key to Covenant Blessing.”

Haggai 2:11-12, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Ask now the priests *for* a ruling¹ [the word in the Hebrew is תּוֹרָה (*torah*) which referred to an authoritative declaration of a binding truth^{2,3}]: “If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches bread with this fold, or cooked food, wine, oil, or any *other* food [~‘with this fold’], will it become holy?’” And the priests answered and said, ‘No.’⁴”

Clearly Haggai didn’t need a ruling from the priests. However, for didactic purposes God told him to begin this oracle with the inquiry.⁵ The “holy meat” is in reference to the meat of the Sin Offering. Recall, there were three types of sacrifices offered in the tabernacle/temple:

Dedicatory Offerings (as in the Burnt offering) and the Communal Offerings (as in the Peace offering) had differing regulations when it came to the meat. The meat of the Burnt Offering was wholly consumed on the Altar of Burnt, picturing total consecration. The meat of the Peace Offering was given back to the worshipper who then enjoyed a fellowship meal with the local priest signifying that peace had been restored between God and the sinner.

However, when it came to Expiatory Offerings (as in the Sin Offering) the procedure was quite different. Recall, with this sacrifice the sinner came to the temple with a spotless lamb, laid his hands on the animal (essentially saying, “*This is me!*”) whereupon the priest handed him a knife which he then used to cut the throat of the animal. At this point the priest took over. The blood was collected in a basin. It then would be applied to the horns of the Altar of Burnt Offering (Leviticus 4:7, 18) with the remaining blood “poured” or “drained out” at the base of the altar (Leviticus 4:7)- an incredible picture of Christ’s blood being poured out on account of our sin (cf. Matthew 26:28)! The choice parts of the viscera (the fatty tissue over and on the entrails, the 2 kidneys and their fat, and the appendage to the liver) were then offered on the altar (Leviticus 4:8-10). But then — and here is where it is relevant to our text- the carcass and the remaining entrails were given to the priest for his support (Leviticus 6:25-30; cf. 10:16-20). Now according to Leviticus 6:25, this meat was “most holy” such that the garment which held it (which usually was his outer tunic⁶) also would become holy (cf. Leviticus 6:27)!

That being said, the garment itself could NOT transfer its sanctity/holiness to whatever it came in contact with- only the meat could. It is this “holy meat” which is in reference here.⁷ And so, as the priest walked home with the meat of the Sin Offering bound in his garment, if he stopped at the market to get some bread and the garment touched the bread, the bread would NOT become holy. Such was the ruling of the “the priest” here. Holiness — being spiritually acceptable before God — is NOT something we can give or receive from one another; it is something that only God can give!

Haggai 2:13, “Then Haggai said, ‘If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will *the latter* become unclean?’ And the priests answered and said, ‘It will become unclean.’”⁸

Ironically, the previous scenario is the exact opposite when it comes to our sin. Defilement can be passed on to other sinners, like a contagious disease (Leviticus 11:28; 22:4-7). This is why there are so many warnings in Scripture when it comes to the sin of other people.⁹ Listen to what Jesus told his disciples:

Matthew 16:6, “And Jesus said to them, ‘Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’”

=1 Corinthians 15:33, “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals.’”

Galatians 6:1, “Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.”

The Implication with these verses is that holiness comes from God and so can only be given by God, whereas sinfulness, like a virus, can be communicated and spread from man to man! And so, it had been amongst the people of God at this time.

Haggai 2:14, “Then Haggai answered and said, ‘So is this people. And so is this nation¹⁰ before Me,’ declares the Lord, ‘and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.’”

This is a review of the theme Haggai introduced in Haggai 1:1-11. Because of their corporate sin, the land had become defiled and so under a curse! Recall, the Bible contains two types of discipline when it comes to the people of God: individual and corporate.

- Individual is proactive and so something God is doing at all times in our lives (Hebrews 12:5-13).
- Corporate it reactive and so something God meets out to a covenant community on account of its rebellion and sin (cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28).¹¹

Now when it comes to the Corporate Discipline of a covenant community — whether that be a political nation or a religious nation — the discipline oft-times translates to a cursed land. Speaking of political nation of Israel, Moses warned:

Deuteronomy 28:15-19, “But it shall come about, if you will not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed *shall you be* in the city, and cursed *shall you be* in the country. Cursed *shall be* your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed *shall be* the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock. Cursed *shall you be* when you come in, and cursed *shall you be* when you go out.”

So, one of the curses that can arise when a community in covenant with God rebels is that the land can become sick — which is exactly what occurred amongst the people of God in Haggai’s day!

Haggai 2:15-17, ““But now, do consider from this day onward: before one stone was placed on another in the temple of the Lord, from that time *when* one came to a *grain* heap of twenty *measures*, there would be only ten; and *when* one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there would be *only* twenty. [so, what happened to their food and wine? God couldn’t have been more clear...] I smote you *and* every work of your hands with blasting wind¹², mildew^{13,14}, and hail,^{15,16} yet you *did* not *come back* to Me,’ declares the Lord.”

As we saw when we examined Haggai 1, such was the situation in which God’s people were living soon after they returned to the Promised Land. God brought them back to Palestine in 538 BC to rebuild the temple. Yet for a variety of reasons, they busied themselves with the rebuilding of their private lives to the neglect of God’s command! And so, the land suffered for eighteen years! But then, with the preaching of Haggai God’s people repented and so devoted themselves once again to His service. And the result was tangible blessing!

Oracle Dates in Haggai

Text	Year of Darius	Month	Date of New Moon	Day	Equivalent Date
Hag. 1:1	2nd	6th	Aug. 29	1st	Aug. 29, 520 BC
Hag. 1:15	2nd	6th	Aug. 29	24th	Sept. 21, 520 BC
Hag. 2:1	2nd	7th	Sept. 27	21st	Oct. 17, 520 BC
Hag. 2:10, 20	2nd	9th	Nov. 25	24th	Dec. 18, 520 BC

The Blessing, v. 19.

Haggai 2:19, “Is the seed still in the barn? [The answer was “No!” Recall the previous Oracle, Haggai 2:1-9, was given on October 17, the final day of the Feast of Booths. Shortly after that, it was planting season such that by the time of this fourth Oracle (given on December 18) the seed no longer was in the barn, but in the ground!^{17,18} And this went beyond the grain crop. The text continues...] Even including the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree, it has not borne *fruit*. [In fact, as it was winter, they all would have been in dormancy such that they’d be bear limbs and twigs!] Yet from this day on I will bless *you*.”

I have a question here: Hadn’t God’s people responded positively to the Lord months before, specifically September 21st when Haggai gave the Oracle of Haggai 1:12-15?? They did! Yet — and this is important — in their submission they continued to live under the consequence of their former rebellion, the land remained sick. It wasn’t until the text before us — which was proclaimed three months later — that God removed the curse which rested on their land and labor. Yet even then, they would have to wait months — until harvest — to enjoy the blessing of God!

The implication from all of this is that their obedience was NOT the basis of God’s Covenant blessing (cf. Isaiah 29:13-14)! If it was, God’s blessing would have come months before when they first repented and obeyed. So, what was/is the basis for Covenant Blessing from the Lord? That brings us to the basis.

The Basis, vv. 10, 18.

Haggai 2:10, “On the twenty-fourth of the ninth *month*, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to Haggai the prophet saying.”

Just as with the other oracles given to Haggai, the Lord gives us here the date of this oracle! As just referenced, it was given on December 18, 520 BC.¹⁹ Now unlike the other oracles, the emphasis in this fourth message somehow incorporated this date — for notice, at the climax of

this fourth oracle, God repeats the date.

Haggai 2:18, “Do consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth *month*; from the day when the temple of the Lord was founded,²⁰ consider...”

Recall the word for “consider”²¹ speaks of stepping back from our lives and looking at the big picture. It references a spiritual vigilance which endeavors to look at the world through the eye of the Lord!

Doing that here naturally causes us to look forward to v. 19 and the blessing which we just talked about. However, as the call to “consider” falls on the heels of a repeated statement, you must see that it also encompasses that statement- which here is the dating of this prophecy. So, what was the basis of the restored blessing of the Lord? Why now was God blessing His people? What great thing had they done? At first glance the answer is, “Not a whole lot!”

Notice the expression in this verse, “...from the day when the temple of the Lord was founded...” On the surface it looks like the people of God had accomplished some great task, like the clearing of the temple mount of the many tons of rubble or the rebuilding of the foundation — such that perhaps now they were ready to build in earnest. Yet that is NOT what this expression denotes. RATHER, it simply denotes that they continued their work on the temple — something they began three months prior to this oracle!²² And herein is the “secret” to God’s blessing.

From the beginning call of God from Haggai, God’s people went to work on the temple and continued that work- in spite of:

- The opposition from the local rabble (Ezra 5:3-5).
- The threat that still might come from the Persians when Darius reads the letter of complaint sent by Tattenai, a secular governor living in Palestine at this time (cf. Ezra 5:6-17).
- The current drought, the lack of food, and the uncertain future (Haggai 1:6; 2:17).

In other words, they were faithful to the Lord and His call! That is the key and basis of all covenant blessing from the Lord!

Yet, what drove their faithfulness? This also is key! The promise of blessing? Nope! From the larger context it clearly was their apprehension of the character of God- which as we saw last week is what kept them going in the face of so much misery (cf. Haggai 2:4-6)!

This is a massive theme in Scripture: fidelity fueled by our apprehension of the glory and goodness of God! We serve God NOT because of what He gives us, BUT because in and of Himself He is worthy, and we love Him for it! This and this alone is what produced the Covenant Fidelity throughout the Bible! We see it when Satan took everything from Job, the devil thought

for sure that Job would curse God. Instead, we read this:

Job 1:20, "Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped."

Talk about faithfulness! We know from this book that Job worshipped God throughout his life. And when God took that which was most precious to him, what did he do? He remained faithful. He worshipped! Why? The rest of this book reveals it was because of the greatness and glory of the Lord. For example, listen to the words of Job and so that which drove him.

Job 19:25-27, "And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes shall see and not another. My heart faints within me."

There is no question that which fueled Job's faithfulness to the Lord, his apprehension and awe over the character of God whom He longed to see and enjoy! Christ told the people of God:

Luke 12:36-37, "And be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open *the door* to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master shall find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you [here is the blessing], that he will gird himself *to serve*, and have them recline *at the table*, and will come up and wait on them."

What an incredible prospect which is going to happen some day in eternity future. As we have seen, at the wedding feast of the Lamb the Lord will approach each one of us and give us "praise and glory and honor" (cf. 1 Peter 1:7). How incredible!

Yet, on what basis will God commend us? Again, what great things must we do to receive such commendation? The answer is found in the explanation Christ gave Peter of this text:

Luke 12:41-43, "And Peter said, 'Lord, are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone *else* as well?' And the Lord said [and this is the key], 'Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.'"

Do you see it... faithful/blessed! On what basis is the blessing referenced in this passage given the steward? It is NOT for a great or mighty deed. RATHER it is given on account of faithfulness to our God-given calling! It is how Christ honored God.

John 17:4, "I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do."

How did Christ "glorify" God in His earthly ministry? NOT by all the miracles, signs, teachings,

and the like, BUT simply by being faithful, by “...accomplish[ing] the work which Thou hast given Me to do.”

It is this that stands out in the text before us as the basis for God’s covenant blessing. God’s people hadn’t done great things for the Lord. Rather, in the face of trial, opposition, and famine, they proved faithful to the little He asked of them- which was working on the temple! And why were they faithful? Because:

- According to Haggai 2:4: God was for them!
- According to Haggai 2:5: All the resources of God were at their disposal as He dwelt among them in their midst!
- According to Haggai 2:6: Their God who was for them and working among them was all-powerful and so unthwartable!

Blessing will be ours to enjoy as Christians when God is our portion such that we strive NOT to do great things for Him, BUT simply to be faithful to the little He asks of us! Again, this is a universal theme of Scripture.

Proverbs 15:15: “All the days of the afflicted are bad [whether saved or unsaved, trial and suffering is NOT fun], but a cheerful heart [which in Scripture comes only from knowing and loving the Lord] *has* a continual feast.”

We might wish for a change of scenery in our lives, a change in our condition or even our station. Yet if you have a love-relationship with God you have “a continual feast”! It is this that empowered Christ in His life. After the disciples returned to Christ and noted that He hadn’t eaten anything for quite some time, we read this:

John 4:34, “Jesus said to them, ‘My food [and so my life, my joy, my all] is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work.’”

There is no better place to be as Christians than here! Asaph began Psalm 73 incredibly dissatisfied at his lot as a Christian. Yet when his gaze was lifted up to the Lord, nothing changed in his surroundings, BUT everything changed in him.

Psalm 73:25-26, “Whom have I in heaven *but Thee*? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

This is one of my favorite examples! Habakkuk began this prophecy with dissatisfaction, complaint, and anger toward God. In response, God showed him a little more of His glory! While his circumstances hadn’t changed, he had such that he closed with these words.

Habakkuk 3:17-19a, “Though the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vines, *though* the yield of the olive should fail, and the fields produce no food, though the

flock should be cut off from the fold, and there be no cattle in the stalls, yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' feet, and makes me walk on my high places."

Habakkuk continued faithfully serving the Lord because he saw that God was worthy of such devotion! And therein he was blessed! Recall the opening passage which I read about the "flourishing palm" (Psalm 92)... what produced that growth?

Jeremiah 17:7-8, "Blessed is the man who trusts IN the Lord and whose trust IS the Lord. [this speaks of a confidence that flows from the love and character of God. When this is our life, notice the result...] For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit."

Do you see? Daily devotion fueled by the knowledge of God's love and grace results in a life that flourishes and "is not anxious in a year of drought nor ceases to yield fruit."

This is the message of Haggai's fourth oracle: The Key to Covenant Blessing!

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End Note(s)

¹ "This use of tōrâ for a short instruction of the priest was probably the original meaning of the word, which continued alongside the wider application to the Law of God, the Torah, the body of precepts through which God's way of life for man was made known. Eventually the Torah was what we know as the Pentateuch. This development accounts for the older translations (e.g. Ask now the priests concerning the law [RV])." (Baldwin, 1972, p. 54)

² cf. Zechariah 7:3; Malachi 2:7.

³ "The priests were the official mediators of the divine tōrâ. Their lips were destined to preserve knowledge and from their mouths people should seek instruction (Malachi 2:7; cf. Zechariah 7:3). They were the keepers and interpreters of the divine instruction, the body of precepts through which God's way of life for mankind was made known. Eventually 'Torah' came to refer to what we know as the Pentateuch (Baldwin). The task of the priests was to apply the principles of God's precepts, especially pertaining to ritual and ceremonial purity and impurity, on request of the people in concrete circumstances. This kind of instruction, comparable to the 'word' (dāḇār) of the prophets and the 'counsel' ('eṣâ) of the wise men (Jeremiah 18:18), is called tōrâ, 'instruction,' Weisung." (Verhoef, 1987,

pp. 115-116)

⁴ “Some scholars are of the opinion that the priests were at fault in giving a negative answer, with reference to Ezekiel 44:19, which states that the clothes of the priests must be left in the sacred rooms when they go out to the outer court where the people are, so that they do not consecrate the people by means of their garments! A proposed solution to this problem is the distinction that is made between direct and indirect contact: when the contact is direct the consecration is effected, otherwise not (Wellhausen, Bloomhardt, Horst, Rudolph, et al.). In this case the garment itself will become consecrated, but not the things which are being touched by the garments.” (Verhoef, 1987, p. 118)

⁵ “This passage also provides insight into how postexilic prophetic and priestly communities functioned together, since here the prophet defers to the priests for a decision regarding cultic purity. There is an implicit recognition of priestly authority in such matters. The situation described in vv. 11–14 is unique in that sense; nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible is there a parallel example of priests making a similar judgment. It was to prophets that the Lord communicated fresh disclosures of the divine will either for their own age or for the future. But it was priests who were recognized as being uniquely qualified to provide a ruling on matters of cultic purity by virtue of their role as trusted custodians of the Mosaic law. Malachi 2:7–9 sheds light on the priestly function Haggai alludes to here: “For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction—because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty. But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi,” says the LORD Almighty. “So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law.” The distinctions alluded to in Jer 18:18 (ESV) are also instructive in this regard: “For the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet.” (Richard A. Taylor and E. Ray Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi*, NAC, pp. 172–173)

⁶ “This way of carrying things (cf. Ezekiel 5:3), in the fold of one’s cloak (2 K. 4:39), may suggest a certain regard for the object carried (Pressel).” (Verhoef, 1987, p. 117)

⁷ Cf. Jeremiah 11:15.

⁸ “The answer of the priests in the affirmative that the food would become contaminated when an unclean person touches it is in full accordance with the stipulations of the Law: the person who touches something defiled by a corpse will himself be unclean (Leviticus 21:11; 22:4; Numbers 5:2; 6:6–7; 9:6), and anything that an unclean person touches becomes unclean (Numbers 19:22).” (Verhoef, 1987, p. 118)

⁹ Cf. also Jude 23, “Save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.”

¹⁰ When we think of a “nation” we almost always think of a political entity. Yet in the Bible, a religious grouping of God’s people also was considered to be “a nation” in covenant with God. For example, consider 1 Peter 2:9. In contrast to the wicked, listen to how Peter described the church, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession...” All of these terms were used to describe the OT Political Nation called Israel (cf. Exodus 19:5-6; Is. 43:20-21). Yet in 1 Peter they are used in reference to a religious nation, the church!

This is why Haggai’s reference here to God’s people as a “nation” is NOT problematic! Because the formal nation of Israel/Judah was destroyed in 586 BC, a series of older commentaries interpreted the reference in this verse of “nation” in light of the *Samaritan nation*, part of which were bothering God’s people at this time (Ezra 5:3-17). Yet modern scholarship have all but rejected this interpretation. Again, “nation” in Scripture can refer to the Political entity that began with Moses and was destroyed in 586 BC. Yet it can also be used in reference to the “nation” that God created in Abraham which continued to be in existence after the fall of the Political entity (cf. Gen. 12:2; Leviticus 26:40-45; Is. 58:1; Ezk. 11:20; 34:30; Zechariah 8:8; Matthew 2:6; Romans 9:25-26; Hebrews 8:10). Andrew Hill wrote, “The words people (Hebrews ‘am) and nation (Hebrews gôy) are used somewhat synonymously, with the former denoting the internal social and covenantal relations of the Hebrews and the latter describing the nation-state of Israel as a political entity.” (Baldwin, 1972, p. 88)

¹¹ In the case of Church Discipline where an individual is excommunicated, the discipline is reactive and met out in accordance with the person’s sin (cf. Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:5).

¹² “Hebrew šiddapôn, from the verb šadap, ‘scorch’ by wind; cf. Gen. 41:6, 23, 27), means ‘scorching.’ This verb actually refers to the scorching effects of the hot east wind that sometimes blows across Palestine from the desert, and causes the grain to shrivel up (so Clark). The rendering ‘blight’ is correct, though not strictly accurate. It denotes any disease or injury of plants resulting in withering, cessation of

growth, and death of parts, like leaves, without rotting. The term 'blight' emphasizes the result rather than the cause of the process of withering. Thus, Clark may have a point in contrasting the 'blight' and 'mildew' as having been caused by opposite extremes of humidity: the one is a hot, dry wind, and the other a damp wind, perhaps from the Mediterranean." (Verhoef, 1987, p. 127)

¹³ Cf. Amos 4:9.

¹⁴ "The second term, *yērāqôn*, refers to a disease of the grain caused by a fungus which prevents it from ripening properly. According to Van der Woude both drought and excessive rains can cause the disease of mildew. The terms 'blight' and 'mildew' occur together elsewhere (Deuteronomy 28:22; 1 Kings 8:37; 2 Chronicles 6:28), and, according to Clark, suggest extremes of dryness on the one hand and dampness on the other. His advice to translators is to render the phrase 'I sent hot, dry winds to wither your grain, and damp winds to make it rot.' This interpretation and translation emphasize [sic] the seriousness of the situation. The winds from the desert and from the Mediterranean will all be 'ill winds,' blowing nobody any good! From whichever direction the wind comes, it causes havoc with the crops" (Verhoef, 1987, p. 127)

¹⁵ "Two of the three natural disasters are listed in Deuteronomy 28:22: blight, scorching wind that withers (Hebrews *šiddāpôn*) and mildew, perhaps a rotting fungus spawned by excessive moisture (Hebrews *yērāqôn*)." (Hill, 2012, p. 91)

¹⁶ "hail (Hebrews *bārād*). In addition to the two main causes for crop failure, this third adverse weather condition is mentioned. It may also be associated with a wind blowing from the north (cf. Proverbs 25:23). If the hail is heavy and accompanied by a strong wind, it can damage crops and even injure people and animals (cf. Exodus 9:25–35; Joshua 10:11). There is no reason to join 'hail' with 'all the work of your hands,' and to consider it an addition by a glossator (so Van der Woude). 'Hail' as an instrument of God's judgment is well attested both in history and prophecy (cf. Exodus 9:13–35 and Isaiah 28:2)." (Verhoef, 1987, pp. 127-128)

¹⁷ "The new date (18 December by our calendar) marks a two-month interval since Haggai's previous sermon (2:1). The early rains began in mid-October round Jerusalem, and once the ground had become sufficiently soft seed was sown and ploughing begun. By the middle of December this work would have been completed, with all the accompanying hopes of a good year, free from drought and pests." (Baldwin, 1972, p. 54)

¹⁸ "Clark's summary is appropriate: 'The summers extend from May to September, and are hot and almost completely dry. During this time, the main crops are harvested: wheat in May and June, and grapes in August and September. In October and November the early rains were expected. These softened the ground and allowed it to be ploughed and planted with grain seed for the following year's crop. During the winter months of December, January, and February, the weather grew colder, with rain at intervals, or even with snow. The farmers hoped for more rain in March or April to help the growing grain crops to mature well. Since the total rainfall over the whole year was not very great, even small decreases could have a severe effect on the crops, and cause real hardship to the people.'" (Verhoef, 1987, p. 131)

¹⁹ "The date holds no special significance in terms of celebration of an Old Testament feast day or commemoration of an earlier historical event. Mid-December calls to mind no such occasion. That this date falls on the day before the beginning of the celebration of Hanukkah has no significance for Haggai, since Jewish observance of Hanukkah did not begin until the second century B.C." (Richard A. Taylor, 2004, pp. 170-171)

²⁰ "The expression one stone is laid on another need not imply that the foundation was already laid (cf. v. 18). The function of this expression is to serve as a *terminus a quo*, referring to the time when the work on the temple actually and officially began. The purpose of this statement is not so much to furnish precise information concerning the building activities, but to mark the turning point in the people's experiences." (Verhoef, 1987, p. 124)

²¹ **לֵבָב** (*lebab*) which is the Hebrew word for 'heart'.

²² "The Hebrew word used both in Haggai 2:18 and in Ezra 3:6 for 'the foundation ... was laid' is the verb *yāsad*, which means in most contexts 'to found'. Note that the Hebrew employs no noun corresponding to the English 'foundations'. Two sentences in which the Chronicler uses this verb are particularly instructive: 'Now concerning ... the rebuilding of the house of God ...' (2 Chronicles 24:27, RV), and, speaking of the collection of tithes, 'In the third month they began to lay the foundation of the heaps' (2 Chronicles 31:7, RV) or 'they began to pile up the heaps' (RSV). These examples show that the word

'foundation' is not essential; in fact it has been a very misleading translation. In both the sentences quoted *yāsad* could have been adequately translated by the simple verb 'build'. ¶ Similarly in Ezra 3:10, 11 it would be equally correct and less misleading to translate, 'And when the builders began the restoration' (verse 10), and 'because the restoration of the house of the Lord had begun' (verse 11). Understood in this way the text presents no contradiction between the account of Ezra and the prophecy of Haggai. Work did begin on the temple site in 538, only to cease shortly afterwards until, as a result of Haggai's rebuke, it was resumed in 520 BC. ¶ This interpretation explains the fact that the rebuilding was accomplished in four and a half years, whereas it had taken Solomon, with all his resources of manpower and materials, seven and a half years (1 Kings 6:37, 38) to complete the original temple. Far from being razed to the ground much of the stonework remained intact after the fire (2 Kings 25:9). The main need was for wood (Haggai 1:8) to replace what had been burnt. There was no question of relaying foundations." (Baldwin, 1972, p. 57)