

Encouragement for the discouraged

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[0 : 0 0] It's a great joy to be able to share God's Word with you and to be with you in Kuching again. I think I was here two years ago, right? Yeah, two years ago. So it's nice to be back with you. Just before I start, a quick advertisement. I have two books for sale at the back. Two books.

If anybody likes a love story, the Book of Ruth can be viewed as a love story. So if you want to find out more about that, you can read this one. This one is 15 ringgit, 1.5.

This one is on the Book of Ezekiel. Not really a love story, almost the opposite. So if you don't like love stories, then maybe you can buy this one. It's more to do with God's judgment, but there is also hope. A lot of hope in this book.

If you don't know what the visions mean, very strange visions, you know, with the wheels and the chariots and so on, you can have a read of this book. So 15, and this one is 30.

Today, special offer. You know, GST offer as well, even though I don't pay GST. Neither were you with this book. 40. 40 for both. 4-0.

[1 : 0 4] So some copies are available at the back. Okay, before I start also, if you can just say good morning to the person next to you, even though you might have come with them in the car to say good morning.

Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for doing that.

Later on, I might ask you to say something to the person next to you. So that's why I'm asking you to do this now. So let me pray before we start. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you for you are speaking, God.

We thank you that you have revealed yourself to us in your word and your will for us. We pray that you might teach us the way of your word, that we may follow it to the end.

We pray that you might give us understanding so that we may keep your word and obey it with all our hearts. We thank you for Jesus, who was the living word. We thank you that he became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

[2 : 0 8] We thank you that we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son, who came from you, the father, full of grace and truth. We pray that your Holy Spirit may grant us a clearer and grander vision of you, your living word and your will for us in our lives.

We pray this in your son's name. Amen. So this morning, please keep your Bibles open because we'll be going through the passage and then you can check to make sure that what I'm saying is correct.

Encouragement for the discouraged. Now we all have difficulties and discouragements as we go about our lives. Your God-given task may be to stay at home, to care for your family.

Perhaps you feel that your work is not recognised or not valued. Your task may be to work in industry, to provide for your family and to be a light for Christ there.

Perhaps your colleagues aren't interested as you try to share your faith in Jesus. Your task may be to study, but perhaps your grades are not as good as you would like.

[3 : 25] Your task may be to lead a cell group or perhaps even to preach now and then. Perhaps people don't respond when you teach God's word.

In all these God-given tasks and others, we might feel discouraged. In today's passage, we see that the Jews were also feeling discouraged.

Let's see how God encourages them in their discouragements. And let's see how God's word might help us to persevere when we are discouraged.

So we'll look at this passage in two parts. The first part will be the people's discouragement in verses 1 to 3. And the second part will be God's encouragement in verses 4 to 9.

So firstly, to the people's discouragement. Try to picture the scene. Try to picture the scene. It is 520 BC before Christ.

[4 : 30] It is what is known as the post-exilic period. And everything was dark at that time.

Okay, so we have the post-exilic period. This is the exile when Israel was exiled from the Promised Land. And the post-exilic is just in this blank spot here.

So the remnant of God's people had returned from Babylon to rebuild the temple, to rebuild the city walls, and to rebuild their lives.

So they were in Babylon, which is way across here. And then they had returned back to Jerusalem to try to rebuild what was left behind. But what we see in Haggai chapter 1, the chapter before our passage, is that the people spent a lot of time and effort building their own houses.

Yet they had neglected to build God's house. They had neglected to build the temple. And in the first prophecy of Haggai, in chapter 1, verses 1 to 11, God urges them to reconsider their ways.

[5 : 48] So in Haggai chapter 1, verse 4, it says, Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses while this house remains a ruin?

The Israelites were living in their luxurious panelled houses. While God's house, the temple, lay in ruins. What a contrast.

What a disgrace. And the people respond to God's rebuke. By the second prophecy, in chapter 1, verses 12 to 15, the people started building the temple.

Now note the date that they commenced. Have a look at chapter 1, verse 14. Have a look at chapter 1, verse 14. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God, on the 24th day of the sixth month.

24th day of the sixth month. Now look at the date from the prophecy we're looking at today. Haggai chapter 2, verse 1. What is the date in Haggai chapter 2, verse 1?

[6 : 57] On the 21st day of the seventh month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai. Right, how long was it between the previous prophecy and the prophecy in chapter 2, verse 1?

How long is it? About one month? Yeah, it's about four weeks, right? Why did God need to send another prophetic word at this time?

Why? Now there are at least three possible reasons. First, after four weeks, it's possible that the people were feeling the strain. I'm sure it was hard, back-breaking work to rebuild the temple.

After all, only rubble and debris was left behind after the Babylonians swept through Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. The reconstruction started earlier, but the rebuilding had stopped.

And the work had been abandoned for 16 years. So now the people had to clear out all the rubble and start again. Second possible reason why there was another prophecy only four weeks later.

[8 : 09] The 21st day of the seventh month coincides with the Feast of Tabernacles, which is also known as the Feast of Ingathering. At this time, the Israelites celebrate the harvest and present sacrifices to God.

So can you imagine the frustration that the people would have felt as they are reminded of their lack of resources? This is described vividly in chapter 1, verse 6.

Have a look at chapter 1, verse 6. You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough.

You drink, but you never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.

Why? As it says in chapter 1, verses 9 to 10, it is God's punishment for them neglecting to build the temple. They say, we don't even have the basics.

[9 : 19] We don't even have food and drink. How can we scrounge up the materials to build this temple? Third reason why another prophecy is given one month later.

Now the Feast of Tabernacles corresponds to another major event in Israel's history. 1 Kings chapter 8 tells us that it is during this festival 400 years ago that King Solomon dedicated the temple.

It's like this. I will tell you a date and you tell me what comes into your mind. Okay, ready? I'll tell you a date. 16th of September.

16th of September. Malaysia Day. Yes. 16th of September. Now before 1963, September 16 didn't hold any particular significance.

Unless it's your birthday. September 16, from September 16, 1963 onwards, we always recall what took place in Malaysia on that day.

[10 : 32] The joining together of Malaya, North Borneo, and Sarawak to form Malaysia. Is that correct? Yes.

Thank you. I was going to choose May 9, May 9, but I'm not sure whether it's going to turn into an important date or not. We'll have to see. May 9. So similarly for the Israelites, similarly for the Israelites, the people associated the Feast of Tabernacles on that date with the dedication of Solomon's Temple.

So on the 21st day of the seventh month, their mind was cast back to the dedication of Solomon's Temple. As it says in Haggai 2, verses 2 to 3, Haggai 2, verses 2 to 3, Speak to Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua, son of Josedach, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people.

Ask them, who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?

Nothing. This is the main reason God sent his word through Haggai at this time. It's because those who are 73 years old and older would still remember Solomon's Temple.

[12 : 02] The first temple would have been a sight to behold. As we can see on the next slide. This temple took seven years to build.

The most holy place was overlaid or plated with 20,000 kilograms of gold. 20,000 kilograms of gold in the most holy place.

20 metric tons. If they had a seven wonders of the world back then, Solomon's Temple would be on the list.

It's no wonder then that those who saw Solomon's Temple wept and wailed when they saw the foundations of the second temple. The second temple just did not compare with the splendor and the majesty of this temple.

It's something like the comparison between the splendor of a bungalow and the splendor of the Astana on the other side of the river. Yes.

[13 : 10] Based on the past, the new temple just did not meet expectations. Do you ever reminisce about the good old days?

The good old days. People have said to me the following thing since I've been in Malaysia. You know, I can remember when Roti Chennai still cost 20 cents.

When I used to go to the Cameron Highlands, it still used to be cold. When I was growing up, the Chinese, the Malay, the indigenous, the Indians used to all play together.

In church, the hymns used to be so much more meaningful. The Bible teaching used to be so much more faithful. This is what people have told me.

And I know sometimes I myself reminisce. The milk, I was saying to my wife just last week, used to only cost six ringgit, now it costs seven fifty.

[14 : 14] There used to be so many more students at seminary, I would complain to my colleagues where I teach. Sure, we can reminisce about the past.

Sure, we can praise God for the ways that he has worked in our lives and in our church. But we can't let our discouragements lead to inaction.

We can't let dissatisfaction lead to discouragement like those who had seen Solomon's temple. We can't let disappointment lead to paralysis.

We can't compare the past with what is present and then just give up. Because we can't turn back the clock. walk. The time that God has given us to live and to act is now.

So to God's encouragement, verses 4 to 9. The people were discouraged, yet God gives his encouragement. Take a look at Haggai chapter 2 verses 4 to 5.

[15 : 23] Chapter 2 verses 4 5. But now be strong, Zerubbabel declares the Lord. Be strong, Joshua, son of Josedach, the high priest.

Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the Lord. And work. For I am with you, declares the Lord Almighty.

This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. and my spirit remains among you. Instead of giving up, God tells the people, get to work.

God's positive encouragement is repeated three times. First, to the political leader, Zerubbabel. Second, to the spiritual leader, Joshua. Third, to the people.

Be strong, take courage, take heart. What an encouragement it is to hear this from God himself. The same words that God gave to the first Joshua as he began the task of leading Israel.

[16 : 33] But there is even more encouragement to come. God doesn't just say, get out there and do it by yourself. Did you hear what God said?

Work for I am with you. My spirit remains in your midst. This is in accordance to the covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai.

Referring to the tabernacle, God says in Exodus chapter 29, I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. So God is being consistent here.

The tabernacle temple, and then the temple represented God's presence with his people. Now he says that he will be with them to strengthen them and to enable them to complete their task, the building of the second temple.

And it's the same for us as Christians today, isn't it? God doesn't just give us a task and then leave us to our own devices.

[17 : 46] So my wife and I, we have three children. When our boys were first learning to play the piano, we used to encourage them to practice.

You need to practice piano. But I didn't leave them to practice by themselves. If I left them alone, they would skip pieces. They would read the wrong notes.

They would only practice for a few minutes. So I used to sit right next to them as they practiced piano. Now they're older and they play different instruments, so I can't help them.

But back then, I used to sit with my children as they practiced piano. In a much more significant and in a much more intimate way, God is right here with us.

God is with us as we labor to build his kingdom at home, at work, at church.

[18 : 48] What does God promise us in Matthew, what does Jesus promise us in Matthew 28? And surely, I am with you always to the very end of the age.

church. And what does Jesus promise us in John chapter 14? And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever, the spirit of truth.

God is with us by his spirit in an even more intimate way than for the people in Haggai's day. not only is God's spirit in our midst, not only is God's spirit among us, God's Holy Spirit is actually dwelling in us.

God's spirit dwells within us. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, which is the next slide, 1 Corinthians chapter 3, Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you?

God's spirit dwells in you. It's amazing. God's spirit is not just with us. God's Holy Spirit dwells in us.

[20 : 17] And what a fantastic encouragement for us in our discouragement. We are not on our own. We can really put our back into God's work because God is always with us.

He lives in us by his Holy Spirit, strengthening us, enabling us to do his work. And he promises to be with us even to the very end of the age.

So that's God's first encouragement. encouragement. God's second encouragement is found at the end of verse 5 to verse 9. So take a look at the end of verse 5.

Chapter 2, Haggai, end of verse 5. Do not fear. This is what the Lord Almighty says. In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.

I will shake all nations and what is desired by all nations will come and will fill this house with glory, says the Lord Almighty.

[21 : 32] The silver is mine and the gold is mine, declares the Lord Almighty. The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house, says the Lord Almighty.

And in this place I will grant peace, declares the Lord Almighty. Now, what does God tell the Jews not to do?

What does he tell them not to do? Yes, I think I can hear one or two things.

Do not be afraid. Fear not. Question, what? Did the people fear? What were they afraid of? Ezra chapter three and four tells us that the remnant feared other people, their neighbours, who opposed their work of building the temple.

The people might also fear the larger, more powerful nations that were around them. Of course, at this time, the Jews were living under the Persian Empire.

[22 : 44] As we mentioned before, they might have also been afraid that they wouldn't have enough resources to complete the building. And even if they did complete it, maybe they were afraid that it couldn't compare with Solomon's temple.

So in response to their fear, God says, do not fear. God himself is going to come and act.

In verse six, God says, in a little while I will once more shake. He says shake, right? Shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.

What do you think about that? Shake. God is going to shake. A little bit strange, isn't it? Perhaps a bit surprising.

What does this mean, that God is going to shake? A hint is in the phrase, once more, once more. This means that God has done this shaking sometime in the past.

[23 : 53] The first shaking probably refers to Mount Sinai. In Exodus, when God spoke to Israel amid the thunder and lightning, Exodus 19, 18, says, the whole mountain trembled violently.

Trembled violently. That sounds like shaking, doesn't it? Shaking is thus associated with the awesome presence of God, the awesome presence.

He is about to come once more, and it will shake the whole cosmos. Shaking, in verse 7, involves the nations.

This shaking calms the fears of the people about the lack of glory or the lack of grandeur of their work. For God will shake the nations.

And then, what's going to happen? Shake the nations. Verse 7, what is desired by, or the treasures of the nations will come in.

[25 : 02] Other versions have the treasures of the nations will come in. Shaking somehow is going to release treasures. treasures. Now, if we could look at the next slide, which we can't, there's a picture of my son, who is now 14 years old.

But my wife and I are a little bit lazy, so he's only ever had one birthday party when he was six years old. And the picture is, oh, here we go, this is a picture of his birthday party when he was six.

Do you know what he's about to try and hit? Do you know what that is? It's a piñata. It's a piñata. So my wife and I were a bit lazy, we bought a piñata with lollies in it for his party.

And so my son and his friends swung this stick very violently to hit this piñata. What happens? The piñata shakes after they hit it.

The piñata spins around. And after a good bashing of this piñata, all the lollies fall out. And the children are very happy. Our passage tells us that God would shake the nations.

[26 : 18] Goodies for the temple would fall out. And God has the right to extract material wealth from the nations.

Why? He says in verse 8, the silver is mine and the gold is mine. God is the king of the universe.

All wealth ultimately belongs to him. So the treasures from the nations are going to be used to adorn the temple.

The temple will be filled with glory. But the question is, was this prophecy fulfilled? Did this actually take place?

God is going to be greater than the person next to you and you tell them whether you think this prophecy was fulfilled or not.

[27 : 21] The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house. The glory of the house of the temple they're building now, God says, is going to be greater than the glory of Solomon's temple.

Turn to the person next to you. Was this actually fulfilled? One minute. Okay, I see some discussion going on.

Right. Now, who said or whose partner, your partner, said that this was actually fulfilled? A few? Anybody say it wasn't fulfilled?

Okay, some people say yes and no. Okay, right. I would suggest that it's fulfilled in three ways. Fulfilled in three ways. So firstly, it's fulfilled in the time of Haggai.

This is what we read in Ezra chapter 6, which is the next slide. Moreover, I, that is King Darius, hereby decree what you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of this house of God.

[29 : 04] Their expenses are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury from the revenues of trans-Euphrates so that the work will not stop whatever is needed.

Dot, dot, dot. The treasures of the nations flowed into the Persian king's coffers, and he channeled these to the building of the temple.

Second, during the time of Herod, during the time of King Herod, he would channel the resources of the Roman Empire to expand the temple and the temple site.

King Herod would work in total 80 years on the temple, and eventually its glory would overshadow even Solomon's temple. temple. In this sense, the glory of the temple became greater than its former glory as prophesied by Haggai in our passage today.

But wait, there's more. God also promises shalom, peace. This word has ideas of wholeness, shalom has ideas of well-being, and prosperity in verse 9.

[30 : 26] It is God's peace given in or through the temple. As we look back as Christians, we see that the fulfillment of Haggai's prophecy was way beyond what he could have imagined.

For the third fulfillment is a temple not made by human hands. the temple would be Jesus' own glorious body, destroyed and then raised in three days.

His glory makes the splendor of the former temple fade in comparison. And through Jesus' death and resurrection, we would gain ultimate shalom, ultimate peace.

peace. This is how Jesus describes his peace in John 14. Next slide. Please read with me after three. One, two, three.

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

[31 : 45] So we do not need to fear anything. We don't need to be anxious, for the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

We are now all part of God's temple. He will continue to provide all we need as we go about building his church.

God will supply all our needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus. What do you think? A wonderful promise, right?

God is going to supply all we need. Now my family and I are in Malaysia with OMF, OMF International. We've been here now for seven years, seven years and four months.

Now one thing that God has taught us is to trust in him. He will supply all we need. Sure, there's been times where we've needed to pay for big items.

[32 : 49] We've had to buy cars and we had to send our children to international school, which is more expensive than buying a car. But God through his people have supplied all our needs, often just when we needed it.

OMF, our organisation, has a motto which is buy prayer, buy prayer. prayer. This means that we cannot ask our supporters and partners for financial help.

This policy has ensured that we rest on God's promise that he will provide all we need. And he has, for seven years and four months at least.

And he's also provided much, much more. We are confident that God will continue to provide for us if he wants us to continue here in Malaysia.

As Christians, we can all persevere in building God's church and his kingdom. We can be confident that he'll supply all we need.

[34 : 02] And we look forward to another shaking. As it says in Hebrews chapter 12 verse 26, please read with me after three.

One, two, three. At this time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens.

There will come a day when God will appear once more to shake not only the earth, but also the heavens. At this final coming, the nations will come to Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the nations will fill the heavenly Jerusalem with splendor.

Picture this scene from Revelation 21, which is the next slide. Please read with me, one, two, three. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.

[35 : 22] The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. So this is the final vision, the end of our story. No temple will be needed, because God will be right there with us.

We'll finally be able to see God face to face. What a blessing. And this, our glorious future, is what we can look forward to.

But how can we be sure that this is going to happen? How can we be sure that this picture is going to happen? Can we trust God's word?

Yes. Because we can look back at Haggai's prophecies, and we can see how they were fulfilled. We can see that one, God's promise to be with us is fulfilled and intensified.

God's Holy Spirit is in us. Two, God's promise to act on their behalf, on the behalf of his people, is fulfilled in Darius, it's fulfilled in King Herod, and it's fulfilled in the greatest temple, which was Jesus himself.

[36 : 48] So God is faithful. God is powerful. He can and he will do what he promises. He can trust that God will continue to provide all we need to build his church.

We can trust that what God promises in the future will happen. For at times we face frustration and opposition.

Sometimes it almost drives us to despair. Yet we can encourage one another to keep an eye on the bigger picture. that we are doing God's work, not our own.

We are building his church. The stones we lay may seem insignificant, but we serve an almighty God who uses even our feeble efforts for his purposes, even beyond what we can imagine.

in your life you might feel discouraged. At home, at work, it's a great joy to be able to share God's word with you and to be with you in coaching again.

[38 : 02] I think I was here two years ago, right? So it's nice to be back with you. Just before I start, a quick advertisement. I have two books for sale at the back.

Two books. If anybody likes a love story, the book of Ruth can be viewed as a love story. So if you want to find out more about that, you can read this one. This one is 15 ringgit, 1.5.

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Today, special offer, you know, GST offer as well, even though I don't pay GST, neither were you with this book. 40, 40 for both, 4-0.

[39 : 01] So some copies are available at the back. Okay, before I start also, if you can just say good morning to the person next to you, even though you might have come with them in the car to say good morning.

Thank you, thank you, thank you for doing that. Later on, I might ask you to say something to the person next to you, so that's why I'm asking you to do this now. So let me pray before we start.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you for you speaking gospel. Thank you.