

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

*November 10, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin*

## **Commentary on Haggai 2:1-9** (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

Roughly fifty years after the fall of Jerusalem (587), the balance of power in the area had shifted from the Babylonian Empire to the Persian Empire. As recorded in Zechariah and Nehemiah, the Persians under King Darius allowed the Jews to return and begin the rebuild of Jerusalem. The short book of Haggai, whose name means "festival", is a word of encouragement to rebuild. The time of punishment is over. The "spirit" of God has returned to dwell with the people. Just as in the story of Job, the restoration will result in an even greater abundance than the original for God will "shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come".

## **Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17** (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

Those in Thessalonica were concerned because some of those who had become followers of Christ had died and Jesus had not yet returned. The community was beginning to realize that the promised return may not happen in their lifetime. So what happens to those who died before the return? Paul's response gives both hope and assurance that all those who died believing in Christ will be raised first. In his first letter, Paul uses the image of God's trumpet (1 Thessalonians 4:16) which will signal Jesus' return. This second letter, however, seems to address a misconception that Jesus had already returned. Paul attempts to correct this error by pointing to the apostasy of taking God's throne in the temple (Daniel 11:36, Ezekiel 28:2). Before Jesus returns, the "lawless one" must rise but there is no reason for the faithful to worry as long as they hold fast to the proclamation of the good news. Salvation is begun through faith and made perfect through the sanctification by the Spirit.

## **Commentary on Luke 20:27-38** (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

Unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees held to the Torah (first five books of Moses) which does not mention resurrection but does contain the levirate marriage law (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). Under this law, the wife of the eldest son would automatically become the wife of the next oldest if no children were conceived in the first marriage. While this law may seem archaic, the law was written for the protection of the women. Since the woman had already been married, she would be unable to wed again due to lack of dowry and, with no children to support her, she would most likely become destitute. The scenario, therefore, is laid out as a trap to show the error of Jesus saying that the Son of Man will rise in three days since the Sadducees reject the idea of the resurrection. Jesus responds to the trap by pointing out that in the Torah it mentions that Moses spoke to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all in the present perfect tense and not in the past tense. If Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still alive then surely there is life after death. In fact, since God is the author of all life, God is not the God of the dead but of the living. And since no one "belongs" to anyone but God, then marriage and the need for marriage in the resurrection is a mute point. For surely brothers and sisters would not be married to one another since all are "children of God" and therefore siblings.

## **Sermon "A Living God"** (*[Sermon Video](#)*)

All three scriptures bring home the firm belief that God is with us today. Too often we are preoccupied with what is going to happen in the future. The people in Thessalonica (today Thessaloniki) Greece were worried that they had missed Jesus' second coming and the Sadducees tested Jesus on the validity of the resurrection. They both were so focused on what might happen and when it might happen that they had lost sight of the fact that God is with them today.

If we are not focused on what might happen in the future, we are often reflecting on what happened in the past. People wallow in memories of the "glory days" and miss the wonders of today.

"It has never been done that way" and "I wish we were as big or as exciting as we used to be" are both ways of living in the past. The past is gone and dead but today presents us with new hope and opportunities. This was Haggai's message to the returning exiles when they found Jerusalem in ruins. God had punished the people in the past and God's spirit had left Jerusalem but God is with them now! Through Haggai, God proclaims, "My spirit abides among you; do not fear." Our God is a God of the now!

On Memorial Day, we remember all those who died in defense of their country. But while they gave the ultimate sacrifice once, there were many who returned and die a little each day. Surrounded by the ghost and horrors of what they face, our veterans carry burdens that those who never saw combat can not even imagine. While some lost limbs, most lost parts of themselves. This is manifestly obvious in the number of homeless and addicted veterans. They can not seem to leave the past and find it hard to hope in a future. They need the living God now! They need to know that God's spirit abides among them and they can have "eternal comfort and good hope" in Jesus.

For all who are tortured by memories of the past, we worship a God of the living and not the dead. For all who find it difficult to imagine a future of hope, "may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word." We love and serve a living God. God's spirit is with us. Let us walk together without fear but in faith, hope, and love.