

"Elvis has left the building." That sentence became the standard benediction at the end of Elvis Presley concerts to encourage fans to accept the fact that there would be no more encores. "That's it. It's over. Elvis has left the building," shorthand for, "Y'all go home now!" Today we use this phrase to say someone has made an exit or something is over. When Elvis left the building he just moved on to the next concert. But what happens when God leaves the building? It was no big deal when Elvis moved on but, to a Jew in the OT, it was catastrophic when God's glory left the temple. That's what happened before the Jews were carted off by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. The book of Ezekiel recounts the sad tale of God's glory leaving the temple.

God had made His presence known for hundreds of years. As far back as the Exodus from Egypt, when Moses built a portable tent or tabernacle as a place of worship, God's presence was unmistakable. Ex. 40:34-35 says, "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle."

Eventually, when King Solomon built a permanent place of worship in Jerusalem, God once again made His presence known. "It happened that when the priests came from the holy place, the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord." 1 Ki. 8:10-11. In 586 B.C. God's people took their eyes off the Lord and paid for their disobedience by being taken into captivity. The temple was destroyed.

When the people of God returned to Jerusalem after 70 years, the temple was in ruins. 16 years passed and they had not rebuilt the temple, the center of Jewish worship. God sent a prophet named Haggai with a message, "You have been building your houses, your businesses, your families but you haven't been building a life of worship and devotion to God. That is why you were exiled to Babylon to begin with, because you neglected the thing that matters most – the glory of God." At the end of chapter 1, the people obeyed the word of the Lord and got to work.

But it wasn't long before they became discouraged all over again...2:1-3. This second message from the prophet Haggai comes about 30 days after the people went to work rebuilding the Temple. Progress was slow for many reasons. Besides the 60 years-worth of rubble that had to be cleared, there were the occasional Jewish festivals not to mention opposition from those who had settled in the area while Israel was in Babylon. But the greatest source of discouragement was the fact that the shekinah glory did not return to the temple.

Ezra 3:12-13 describes the scene as the temple was going up. "The people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away."

In the second chapter of Haggai, the prophet asked three rhetorical questions:

Who of you ... saw this house in its former glory?

How does it look to you now?

Does it not seem to you like nothing?

Have you ever felt like God has left the building? Have you gone through times when He seems practically weightless. The OT word for glory is "kabod" which literally means "heavy." God should rest heavy on our minds and in our hearts. When God's glory becomes unimportant, God

becomes weightless. So, what do you do when it seems like God has left the building, when it feels like God is absent? Haggai tells us, “Be strong and get to work for I am with you.”

1. Work with the strength that comes from God’s abiding presence...v. 4. It is one of the most precious promises in the Bible.

To Isaac God said, “Fear not for I am with you.” Gen. 26:24

To Jacob in a dream God said, “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” Gen. 28:15

To Joshua, “I am with you as I was with Moses.”

To Israel, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Is. 41:10

When Jesus comes to earth, He is called Immanuel – “God with us.”

When Jesus leaves the earth He promises, “I am with you even to the end of the age.”

From cover to cover God promises His presence. And His presence gives us strength. I can still recall as a child, waking up in the middle of the night in fear. I couldn’t even leave my bed for fear that I would be attacked by some malevolent boogey man. So, I would call out for my mom or dad. Two things would happen – they always came and turned on the light. Amazing how a little light shifts the balance of power! But even if they hadn’t turned on the light, just their mere presence was a game changer. We can be very brave...together.

But we all experience times when God doesn’t seem like He’s in the next room. It seems like He has left the building. What then? Verse 5...

2. When God’s presence is hard to discern, work with the strength that comes from confidence in God’s promise. These are anxious times we’re living in. More people than ever are being treated for anxiety disorders! Some see no clear purpose for their lives while others are overwhelmed by all the crises we see daily—mass shootings, super storms, terrorism. A promise allows us to reach out into the future and make the uncertain certain.

Haggai reminds the people of the promise God made to the Israelites in Ex. 19:4-6, “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” God promised to preserve a people, a remnant, priests who would promote the coming of the Kingdom of God.

There may be no way to prove God’s presence but we do have a way to prove God’s promise – prophecy. The Bible records at least 1,800 distinct prophecies—spanning more than 8,000 verses? The vast majority have already come true!

All the promises of God in the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. When you have Christ, sooner or later you will have both Christ himself and everything God promised through Christ. “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.” 2 Cor. 1:20

In vv. 6-9 God makes two staggering promises through Haggai - the first is that God is going to shake the nations. In other words, My presence will be unmistakable. This is a reference to Ex. 19...shaking of Mt. Sinai at the giving of the Law. "On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly." Ex. 19:16, 18

When did this happen? Or will it happen in the future? Yes. What earth-shaking event is associated with Jesus? At the end of Matthew's gospel, when Jesus was crucified, "The earth shook and the rocks were split." What about the future? Zechariah 14 also foretells that, prior to the return of Jesus, the Mt. of Olives will be split in two as all the nations of the world gather to wage war in the battle of Armageddon. Then Jesus will reign over His eternal kingdom, a kingdom described in Hebrews 12:28, "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe." Those who tether their lives to the promises of God are unshakable.

The second promise is that the latter glory will be greater than the former glory...v. 9. In other words, you ain't seen nothin' yet! Five centuries later, Herod rebuilt Zerubbabel's temple. It was a magnificent structure but there was still no glory there, at least not until a young couple named Mary and Joseph carried their baby onto the temple mount and were met there by a faithful old man named Simeon. When he looked upon this child he said, "My eyes have seen your salvation...a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." The glory returned to the temple. In fact, in John 2:19-21 Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

Jesus claimed to embody the very presence of God. In the OT the temple was the place where God made His presence known. When Jesus came to earth God's glory rested on Him. That's why John said, "We beheld His glory." Once God met with His people in the temple. Now, God meets with His people in Jesus Christ. In fact, God gave John a vision of our future home, he said, "I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple."

Once Jesus left the earth after the resurrection, the church, by virtue of the presence of Jesus, became the repository of God's glory, "Know ye not that you are the temple of God?" 1 Cor. 3:16. We, as the body of Christ, have the same Presence dwelling within us. God doesn't dwell in buildings made with hands. Now He takes up residence within His people, His living stones.

3. Work with the awareness that there is more to your work than meets the eye. You build more than you see. What you are doing is far more significant than you realize. God encouraged His people by reminding them that they were part of a glorious future when the temple would be full of His glory and the desire of all nations would inhabit the temple. It will be characterized by shalom. (v. 9). So, their work was more than merely constructing a building; it was a spiritual work which would culminate in God's ultimate Kingdom purposes. They were not just building a building. They were contributing to God's program of one day filling the earth with His glory.

It is one of the most dominant themes in all of scripture - God takes our small and seemingly insignificant things and builds them into a habitation for His glory.

Never underestimate the importance of any work that is done for the glory of God, in the name of Jesus, by the power of His Spirit. That is a winning formula that cannot be defeated. “Work, for I am with you.” When God is working at your side no job is trivial. I’ll never forget the man I took to Guatemala on a Mercy Ships trip...he complained...meanwhile the first lady of the country paid a visit...she reported what she saw to the president...he requested a Bible study in the presidential palace. If you were to set out to influence the president and the first lady of a foreign country, how would you do it? Write a letter? Use social media? Travel to the capitol and ask to see the president? I wouldn’t have a clue, but God does.

When the foundation is shaking, one thing we can do is to remember the lessons learned by previous generations - get to work...with HEARTITUDE. Heartitude is a mindset demonstrated by those who have an unshakable commitment to the Kingdom of God and do everything for the glory of God. Heartitude is described in 2 Chron. 16:9, “The eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth so that He can strongly support those whose heart is completely His.”

If things are not what they used to be, remember, God is still present. If things are not what they used to be, remember, God always keeps His promise. His promises are unshakable.

He promises to use you, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you” John 15:16

He promises to equip you — “with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ” Heb. 13:21

He promises that His grace is sufficient. “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” 1 Cor. 12:9

Exegetical note – The Pharisees were looking at the physical structure (Heb. Mikdash) of the temple but when Jesus said, "Destroy this temple" He used the word in Hebrew 'Mishkan' which was the word used in the Old Testament of the Presence that lit up the holy of holies on Yom Kippur in the tabernacle or temple. Jesus said I am the temple (Mishkan) of God. When the glory (Heb. Sh'chinah) would come down like a tornado or funnel right through the roof of the holy of holies and the Presence would manifest on the mercy seat between the cherubim after the blood was sprinkled, that was the mishkan. That Presence was what Jesus said dwelt within Him.