

## X. *Haggai's Housework*

05-Feb-06 Haggai 1:2-15

*Theme:* God stirs up the spirits of the remnant to obedience through the word of the prophet.

*Key Verses:* Haggai 1:3-5 <sup>3</sup>Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, <sup>4</sup>“Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?” <sup>5</sup>Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: “Consider your ways!”

### Review

Last week we were introduced to the *who's who* of Haggai's day. First there was the *powerful Persian*, Darius, who continued the work of Cyrus in allowing God's people to build the Temple of God. In His sovereignty, at exactly the right moments in time, God turned the hearts of Cyrus and Darius to look kindly upon His people.

Next, we met the religious and civil leaders of God's people: Joshua, the *purified priest*, and Zerubbabel, the *godly governor*. Once again, we can see God's sovereign grace in putting these men in charge of God's people at this crucial point in history. The prophet Micah reminded the people of his day how God had provided wise leaders during the Exodus (Micah 6:4). Once again, we have righteous leaders leading God's people out of captivity and returning with spoils to the Promised Land.

Perhaps you can identify with the *procrastinating people* of Jerusalem. As James Boice points out, they were “the right people, living in the right place, trying to do the right work for the right reasons.” And yet, they had fallen into the trap that so many of us fall into. Time, age, changing priorities, other commitments, opposition, discouragement, difficulties, etc. had gotten in the way of building for God's glory.

That's why God sent Haggai, the *practical prophet* to encourage the remnant. They needed his exhortation to restart the work they had begun. Praise God that He always completes His work:

<sup>6</sup>... being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6).

Finally, we were reintroduced to our *great God*, the “LORD of hosts.” That name of God is an appropriate reminder of His victory over all opposition in the world. This name also reminds us that our primary duty, our chief and highest end, is to glorify God through worship. The hosts of heaven gather around God in worship. We must do the same.

Haggai is a very practical book, exhorting us to be about the business of building God's Temple, His kingdom, His Church. Like the remnant of Haggai's day, we are called to build for God's glory.

### Introduction

The period of Israelite history that we call the Restoration was very different than the Kingdom era before the Babylonian captivity. After the return from exile, only a few Jews returned to Jerusalem and Canaan. The exodus back to Jerusalem in Ezra 2 records that just under 50,000 people returned in 538 BC, a far cry different from the original Exodus when perhaps 2 million

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people left Egypt. Most of the Jews remained scattered throughout the Persian Empire, such as Esther and Mordecai, Ezra (before his return in 458 BC), and Nehemiah (before his return in 445 BC). Those who returned faced difficult conditions. They had to reestablish their society, their culture, their economy, and their religious practice. They had no king; rather they lived under the protection and laws of the Persian government. Never again would they have the political influence and autonomy that they enjoyed during the days of the kings.

The Babylonian captivity also wrought changes in the character and consciousness of the people as a nation. During the kingdom years, the Israelites fought a never-ending and ultimately losing battle against the snares of idolatry. Syncretism, superstition, and outright paganism crept into the religious life of Israel. Golden calves, Baal, Asherah pillars, pagan high places – all of these seemed more attractive than the prescribed worship of Yahweh at the Temple. The pre-exilic prophets were constantly exhorting Israel and Judah to repent of their idolatry and return to the Lord. However, this tendency to chase after other religions is wiped out in the people of God through their exile experience.

In the Restoration period, we no longer see pagan idolatry as a cultural problem. Instead, the sins are more subtle. Idolatry still exists, it just takes other forms. We will see in today's lesson that it takes the form of comfort – of putting your priorities ahead of God's. In Malachi, we see the same thing – they withhold the tithes and offerings because they want to keep them for themselves (*cp.* Mal. 3:6-10). In the New Testament, we see the idolatry of legalism – the Pharisees turn orthodoxy into an idol and end up sinning against the greater part of the law in their efforts to keep the least of it. These subtler forms of idolatry are still with us today, and thus make a study of the Restoration prophets particularly applicable to the 21<sup>st</sup> century Church.

It is in this context of the Restoration period that God sends three Old Testament prophets to the remnant. Near the beginning of this period, He sends Haggai and Zechariah (520 BC). Towards the close of the Old Testament (about 440 BC), God sends Malachi to aid in the work of Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the governor (once again we have prophet, priest, and “king”). Haggai and Zechariah were “the Restoring prophets, whose work was to rear the Mosaic institutions from the ashes of the exile, and set them again in operation after the seventy years Sabbath. At the close, we find Malachi, the Reforming prophet, correcting the abuses, the skepticism, and the discouragement which eighty years of depression had generated” (Moore).

Haggai was the first of the post-exilic prophets, and his ministry was the shortest, only four months. But what an amazing four months! Haggai was specifically raised up by God for one task: to exhort and encourage the remnant to rebuild God's house, the Temple. As we will see today, our prophet was successful in his mission. *Haggai's housework* consisted of four dated messages, with one dated response from the remnant:

1. Sixth month, first day: exhortation to rebuild the Temple (1:2-11)
  - Sixth month, twenty-fourth day: people begin to rebuild the Temple (1:12-15)
2. Seventh month, twenty-first day: encouragement about Temple being rebuilt (2:1-9)
3. Ninth month, twenty-fourth day: promise that God will bless the people (2:10-19)
4. Ninth month, twenty-fourth day: Zerubbabel chosen by God (2:20-23)

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Today, we will be looking at Haggai's first message of exhortation to rebuild the Temple and the people's response. Taken together, both sections of Haggai chapter 1 can be considered in a chiasmic outline, emphasizing God's command to rebuild the Temple:

### Outline of Haggai chapter 1

- a. Date: 1st day of 6<sup>th</sup> month (1:1a)
- b. People disobey, don't build Temple; who's who is listed (1:1b-4)
  - c. Frustration: expected much, received little (1:5-7)
  - d. CENTER: Therefore, build My house! (1:8)
  - c'. Frustration: expected much, received little (1:9-11)
- b'. People obey, begin to build Temple; who's who is listed (1:12-14)
- a'. Date: 24<sup>th</sup> day of 6<sup>th</sup> month (1:15)

### Exposition

#### A. Topsy Turvy (1:2-11)

##### 1. *Paneled Palaces* (1:2-4)

The remnant of God's people had been living in Jerusalem for the past 18 years. They had first returned in 538 BC. Zerubbabel the governor, the heir of David, and Joshua the high priest, heir of Zadok, had led the exodus back to Jerusalem. They had received a commission from Cyrus the Persian to rebuild their Temple and re-establish their society. They were given much gold, silver, and precious articles to use in their reconstruction efforts. Approximately 50,000 souls returned to the Promised Land. They started well, and soon had erected a new burnt altar and re-initiated the priestly sacrifices. They even laid the foundation of the Temple and began that work as well.

But as we have seen, opposition arose, and other cares surfaced, and slowly but surely the work ceased. It's not as if the remnant had forgotten their commitment to rebuild God's Temple. It's just that it became difficult, they grew lazy, and other priorities became more important. They fully intended to restart the work; they were just waiting for the right time. And according to them, **the time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built** (v. 2b). The remnant's priorities were *topsy turvy* – completely upside down.

It is into this situation that God sends the prophet Haggai with the mission to re-order their priorities, to reorient their spiritual compass, to align their goals with God's objectives. Listen to Haggai's biting words: **Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?** (v. 4).

Haggai is pointed out to the remnant that their priorities have been reversed. Their first priority was to rebuild God's house, but they had not spent any time on that project. Meanwhile, they apparently had enough time to not only fix up their houses, but to make them ornate and beautiful. Haggai is not condemning their *paneled palaces* per se; rather, he is condemning their priorities. Jordan explains:

During the 17 year period when they were unable to build God's Temple, they turned their attention to other tasks that were perfectly valid, cultural mandate tasks. But they neglected the first work, which is worship (Mt. 21:13 – "My house will be called a house of prayer"). What did Moses ask Pharaoh? "Let us go three days journey into the wilderness to worship." Worship is the foundation of everything else. Everything flows

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out of worship and flows back into worship. The people have forgotten this and put all of their attention into their paneled houses. Are nice houses wrong? No – we are entitled to enjoy the blessings of the covenant of God. It is not wrong to have a nice house, but it is when your priorities are wrong.

Does this diagnosis sound familiar? James Boice thinks so:

When I read this I think of the evangelical church in America. It fits the pattern of the Jewish remnant perfectly. Evangelicals are orthodox; in that sense they are the right people. They are in the right place; they attend good, Bible-believing fellowships. They are trying to do the right things; they want to share the gospel and do works honoring God. They are even trying to do it for the right reasons; that is, they really want to please God rather than man and see Christ honored. But something is wrong. Their intentions do not come to fruition, and the reason is their failure to put God first. Instead of having God first, they put affluence first. At this point we are beginning to see why the failure of the people to build the Lord's house was so tragic, and why similar failures are so tragic for ourselves. The failure to proceed with the temple was the result of inverted priorities, and in the final analysis all inverted priorities are idolatry. They put the creation before the Creator.

### 2. Consider Carefully (1:5-8)

After identifying the root cause of the problem, Haggai goes on to challenge the remnant to consider the symptoms. He tells them to *consider carefully* their situation. Twice we read: **Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!"** (vv. 5, 7). He then goes on to describe what they are to consider – that all of their human efforts have been frustrated:

<sup>6</sup>You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes (Hag. 1:6).

Although they lived in beautiful houses, God is saying that they are not satisfied with their lives. They don't have enough money or food or clothes. The material things of this life are not satisfying their deepest needs. Eventually, because their priorities have been reversed, their efforts have been frustrated. Moore comments: "A careful examination of the past would show, that instead of cheating God, they had only been cheating themselves."

In verse 8, Haggai offers the solution to the problem:

<sup>8</sup>"Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD (Hag. 1:8).

This is the central exhortation of the chapter and the hinge of the chiasmic structure. Haggai tells them to stop paneling their homes and to start paneling God's house. They are commanded to collect the materials for construction and then get about that work. The exhortation to **go up to the mountains** reminds us that worship is a mountaintop experience. We go up to the mountaintop to worship God. God's people are to stop living for themselves and to start living for God and worshipping Him.

Jordan offers this insight:

The general picture is this: civilization is a bunch of houses organized around the Lord's house. The people have been wasting their time decorating their own houses, but their

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civilization is not established because they have neglected building God's house. Every civilization is established on organized, special worship. In the New Covenant age, this is not about building a beautiful building; we are talking about something different than evangelism and personal discipleship. This is spiritualized falsely such that building the house of God means going out and winning souls and discipling them. There is nothing wrong with that, but when the Bible talks about building the house of God, it means organizing a community around the throne of God. It has to do with rebuilding worship in the Church.

Haggai's remedy gets to the heart of the problem. It is a worship issue. All of life is about worship – it is a matter of getting our worship priorities straightened out. The WCF Larger Catechism sets out that priority in the very first question:

Q. 1. What is the chief and highest end of man?

A. Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy Him forever.

Notice that the reason God gives to build His Temple is to **be glorified**. Furthermore God takes **pleasure** when He is worshiped. God enjoys it when we worship Him! That realization alone can transform the way you approach worship. God takes pleasure in our worship.

### 3. Lean Living (1:9-11)

Verses 9-11 repeat and expand the theme of *lean living* that Haggai has already introduced. Chiasmically, these verses balance verses 5-7:

<sup>9</sup>“You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?” says the LORD of hosts. “Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. <sup>10</sup>Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. <sup>11</sup>For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands” (Hag. 1:9-11).

Once again, we see how hard the remnant worked only to gain little for their efforts. What was implicit in verse 6 is now made explicit here: the reason for their futility was because God sent it. God called for the drought; God blew it away; God frustrated the labor of their hands. The sovereignty of God is affirmed in the affairs of men.

How common is this experience in the people of God? Whenever you place the creation before the Creator, you are sooner or later going to have a similar experience. God will send you “leanness” in order to reorient your priorities. The Israelites of Moses' day had the same experience in the wilderness:

<sup>13</sup>They soon forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel, <sup>14</sup>but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tested God in the desert. <sup>15</sup>And *He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul* (Ps. 106:15).

Eighty years after Haggai, the prophet Malachi addressed a similar problem. The remnant was putting material goods ahead of their spiritual duties. As a result, they were not experiencing the material blessings of God.

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<sup>8</sup>“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. <sup>9</sup>You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. <sup>10</sup>Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it” (Mal. 3:6-10).

Ultimately, the issue is one of idolatry – if worshiping God is not your highest priority, then whatever becomes your highest priority is an idol. Idolatry is the substitution of the good for the best – of replacing the Creator with the creation.

<sup>11</sup>He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also *He has put eternity in their hearts*, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end (Eccl. 3:11).

Ecclesiastes 3:11 teaches us that God has put a God-sized hole in our hearts. Although we try to fill it with other things, the only puzzle piece that can truly fit that place in our lives and satisfy us eternally is God. Are you trying to plug that God-sized hole in your heart with a man-made idol? If so, you are doomed to fail. Our first priority is to worship God. Let’s listen to the prophet Haggai and “sort out our priorities.”

### B. Rapid Response (1:12-15)

Haggai had told the remnant to “consider your ways!” And it seems as if they did. In verses 12-15, we have recorded the *rapid response* of Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all the remnant of the people.

#### 1. Open Obedience (1:12)

<sup>12</sup>Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him; and the people feared the presence of the LORD (Hag. 1:12).

The first point to notice is that all of our *who’s who* list is repeated here in this section: the *godly governor* Zerubbabel; the *purified priest* Joshua; the *procrastinating people* who delay no longer; the *practical prophet* Haggai; and our *great God*. Even the *powerful Persian*, King Darius, is included in verse 15. At one level, this repetition serves to balance the chiasmic structure. These characters are introduced to us in verse 1 in the context of disobedience; now they are repeated here in the context of obedience.

More importantly, we are given a sense of the unity of the covenant community. Prophet, priest, king (governor), people – all are in one accord and aligned with the Lord. This is a true picture of what the covenant community should look like. Regardless of role, all of God’s people are committed to His worship and His work. This is an exciting picture of revival, when sin is repented of and God works in His people’s midst. May we pray for this to be true of our covenant community today.

Next, notice how Haggai refers to the people. In verse 2, they were “this people.” Now they are **the remnant**. This term is used often in the Scriptures to represent the true people of God. For example:

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<sup>20</sup>And it shall come to pass in that day that the *remnant* of Israel, and such as have escaped of the house of Jacob, will never again depend on him who defeated them, but will depend on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. <sup>21</sup>The *remnant* will return, the *remnant* of Jacob, to the Mighty God. <sup>22</sup>For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, a *remnant* of them will return; the destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness (Is. 10:20-22).

<sup>32</sup>And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the *remnant* whom the LORD calls (Joel 2:32).

<sup>7</sup>Then the *remnant* of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples, like dew from the LORD, like showers on the grass, that tarry for no man nor wait for the sons of men.

<sup>8</sup>And the *remnant* of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, who, if he passes through, both treads down and tears in pieces, and none can deliver (Mic. 5:7-8).

God rescues and restores His remnant out of the world. His remnant is the true Church, and He is continuously adding people to His remnant, as many as He calls. Bentley comments on the remnant of Haggai's day and our own:

The Jews were not God's faithful remnant merely because of their physical presence in the land. More was required of them if they were to fulfill Isaiah's hopes. They needed to repent of their sin. *It is significant that in Haggai the word 'remnant' is applied to them when they respond in obedience to the voice of the Lord their God.* Those who are trying to obey God's Word and put it into practice in these days are the faithful remnant. The remnant today are characterized by a concern to listen carefully to God's Word and a desire to apply it to their church and personal lives (emphasis added).

Third, notice the *open obedience* of the remnant. They **obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai, the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him** (v. 12b). Although the text does not specifically mention it, they must have also prayed and repented of their sins. These people were still spiritually sensitive to the truth. They had not hardened their hearts; rather their hearts were soft to the truth of God's word. When they heard God's truth, they knew it. Notice how they respond to Haggai. They recognize him for the prophet that he is. Haggai spoke the truth – the word of God – and the people heard and obeyed.

The last point to notice in verse 12 is that **the people feared the presence of the LORD** (v. 12c). In this context, "fear" is more than simple terror or being afraid. Bentley explains:

What does it mean to fear the Lord? It means to reverence him, to have a holy awe and respect for God. It means to acknowledge that God is supreme and the one in control of all events. When a people fear the Lord they have a desire to please Him. When anyone truly loves God there is something wrong if they do not want to please Him. And pleasing God is always shown by obedience.

Jordan suggests that in this case, it means that the people engaged in special worship. That is the natural tendency of one who fears God and seeks to obey Him.

2. *Stirred Spirits (1:13-15)*

God responds immediately to His people's obedience in two ways. The first way is in the reassurance of His presence. **"I am with you, says the LORD"** (v. 13b). This promise is the heart of the covenant: "I will be your God, and you shall be my people." It is the Immanuel principle – "God with us."

<sup>3</sup>... and say to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: "Cursed is the man who does not obey the words of this covenant <sup>4</sup>which I commanded your fathers in the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, 'Obey My voice, and do according to all that I command you; so *shall you be My people, and I will be your God*'" (Jer. 11:3-4).

Previously, the Lord had been against them. He had caused the drought; He had frustrated their efforts; He had limited their success (vv. 9-11). But now, God says that He is with them. That changes everything. Now they can be assured of success. When their priorities line up with God's priorities, nothing can stand in the way. We can join in with Paul and say, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31b).

The second response of God is the gift of *stirred spirits*:

<sup>14</sup>So the LORD *stirred up the spirit* of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and *the spirit* of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and *the spirit* of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God (Hag. 1:14).

God's Holy Spirit stirs up the spirits of Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the entire remnant. What does that mean? Well, it means that He gives them the energy and ability to do God's work. The Holy Spirit equips our spirits for kingdom work. This work of the Spirit is consistent with the "housebuilding pattern" in Scripture: 1) God calls His people; 2) He provides them the material resources they need; and 3) He provides them the Spiritual gifts they need in order to build His house.

The primary example of this housebuilding pattern is in the Exodus. God called them out of Egypt to worship Him. God provided all the material goods they would need by "plundering" the Egyptians. And then God gifted special artisans and stirred up their spirits so the house of God—in this case, the Tabernacle—could be built:

<sup>30</sup>And Moses said to the children of Israel, "See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; <sup>31</sup>and *He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom and understanding, in knowledge and all manner of workmanship. ...*

<sup>1</sup>And Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan *in whom the LORD has put wisdom and understanding*, to know how to do all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, shall do according to all that the LORD has commanded." <sup>2</sup>Then Moses called Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, *everyone whose heart was stirred*, to come and do the work (Ex. 35:30-31; 36:1-2).

This housebuilding pattern is repeated here in Haggai. God has called His remnant out of Babylon and back to Jerusalem. He has given them gold and silver and precious articles they need for the Temple. And now, He has *stirred* their *spirits* in order to complete the work.

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The same housebuilding pattern holds true today. God calls us to build His house, that is, to worship Him. He has given us everything we need, both physical and Spiritual to obey Him. Most importantly, He has given us Himself – “I will be with you.”

In verse 15, we learn that the reconstruction effort at the Temple site began twenty-three days after Haggai’s first message. What happened in those 23 days? Were they continuing to procrastinate, to drag their feet, to delay? No! They had to prepare for the building effort. The Temple project had lain fallow for 17 years. They needed to clean up the construction site. They needed to gather building supplies. They needed to bring timber down from the mountains. They needed to organize work crews and sort out work schedules. But most importantly, they needed to bring in the harvest. The sixth month of the year corresponded to September, and it was harvest month. God did not expect them to forsake the harvest; rather He was looking for a real commitment to begin the work. Frankly, I find it amazing that they could get organized and going again so quickly. But that is the impact on God’s people when they receive *stirred spirits*.

### Conclusion

Are you like the *procrastinating people* of Haggai’s day? Do you have good intentions, but never seem to get around to doing what you know is right? Have you lost your fervor for the things of God, for His people, for His worship? Have you considered your ways, to reflect on the leanness in your soul and the frustration in your heart? If so, hear the words of the prophet Haggai, who exhorts us to “put first things first.” Jesus Christ tells us the same:

<sup>33</sup>But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. <sup>34</sup>Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Mt. 6:33-34).

*Haggai’s housework* was to encourage the remnant of God’s people to reorient their spiritual compasses in line with God’s priorities. Our housework is to build God’s kingdom, through obedience and worship. We are called to obey the commands of God, to live holy lives, to love our neighbor, to share the gospel, and to worship our Creator. “The chief and highest end of man is to glorify God and fully to enjoy Him forever” (WCF LC 1).

The remnant of Jerusalem responded in obedience to the message of Haggai. Let us do likewise.

Next week: Theology Conference

Two weeks: Lesson 11 – God’s Glory – Haggai 2:1-9

Close in Prayer.