

Haggai • When Ministry “Things” Overshadow Our Ministry

Introduction

Haggai is composed of 5 messages from God to the Jews who have returned from Babylon to rebuild the temple. Work was halted on the temple by order of King Artaxerxes due to a letter sent by Samaritans. The Jews had rejected the Samaritans request to join the project and entered this complaint against the Jews out of malice. However, it's important to note that the Samaritans' complaint (Ezra 4) and the response from King Artaxerxes specifically entailed the **CITY**, not the **TEMPLE**. So God's tone through Haggai may seem harsh on the surface, but in reality the Jews have used the issue of rebuilding Jerusalem as an excuse to halt work on the temple; they really don't have a justifiable reason for not continuing His work.

¹In the second year of Darius the king, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, ²“Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘This people says, “The time has not come, even the time for the house of the LORD to be rebuilt.”’” ³Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, ⁴“Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?”

⁵Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, “Consider your ways! ⁶You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes.”

⁷Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Consider your ways! ⁸Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified,” says the LORD. ⁹“You look for much, but behold, it comes to little; when you bring it home, I blow it away. Why?” declares the LORD of hosts, “Because of My house which lies desolate, while each of you runs to his own house. ¹⁰Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew and the earth has withheld its produce. ¹¹I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands.”

[Read 1:1-11]

Q: What is the people's point of view as stated in v.2?

A: They don't believe the time is right for the rebuilding of the temple.

Q: What is God's response to this as stated in v.3?

A: They seem to have all the time they need for their own houses but not God's house/temple.

Q: What's the implication of God describing their dwellings as “paneled houses”?

A: Having returned from exile they've gone far beyond just re-inhabiting their homes and making them “livable”; they're spending their time and resources decorating and making them “fancy” to the eye. They've placed their personal priorities over those of God.

Q: Why don't the people's efforts seem to be producing results as intimated in v.6?

A: Not living according to God's ways is being revealed in their physical difficulties. God is sending them a message about their spiritual condition through physical circumstances.

Q: What needs to be done to correct the situation according to v.8 & 9?

A: Return to God's work of building the temple.

Q: What are some of the applications of this principle/situation in our life?

A: Deciding to trim back commitments to God in order to deal with other issues may lead to a spiraling situation that makes us worse off than when we started.

A: Answers are always found when running **TO** the Lord, not **FROM** Him.

A: The daily struggle of pride and self vs. God and His sovereignty.

¹²Then 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 showed reverence for the LORD.

¹³Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke by the commission of the LORD to the people saying, “‘I am with you,’ declares the LORD.” ¹⁴So 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, ¹⁵on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of Darius the king

[Read 1:12-15]

Q: What was the first response of the remnant in v.12?

A: Obedience; a change of their heart.

Q: What was the next response?

A: Reverence; a change in attitude.

Q: When their outlook and attitude changed, what did God follow up with in v.13 & 14?

A: Encouragement and empowerment.

Q: According to v.13 what is, in reality, the only thing the remnant really needs to know and be strengthened by?

A: “I am with you.” Once you have God, everything else will fall into place.

Q: Were the right results obtained simply by working on a building?

A: No. This was a spiritual issue. The physical results of our ministry are produced through our obedience and reverence to Him.

Q: Are churches or organizations “rewarded” or “satisfied” with a building?

A: Only if through our desire to change our heart and attitude now so that we can take possession of His *ministry*, not His building.

[Read 2:1-9]

^{2:1}On the twenty-first of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet saying, ²“Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people saying, ³“Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison? ⁴But now take courage, Zerubbabel,” declares the LORD, ‘take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage,’ declares the LORD, ‘and work; for I am with you,’ declares the Lord of hosts. ⁵As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!’

⁶“For thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. ⁷I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD of hosts. ⁸The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,’ declares the LORD of hosts. ⁹The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘and

Q: What is it that the people are feeling in v.3?

A: The work of the current temple is inadequate, not adhering to the physical splendor of the first temple.

Q: What is God trying to re-focus the people on in His encouragement in v.4 & 5?

A: Having His Spirit is more important and more “secure” than having a building, no matter how splendid its earthly design.

Q: Neither the Ark of the Covenant nor the Shekinah glory will ever reside in this temple. What “glory” is God talking about?

A: The glory of the Word wrapped in flesh (instead of the cloud) in the Messiah.

Q: What is God’s point in v.8 regarding gold and silver?

A: He owns all the gold and silver in the world whether it’s plastered all over this building or not. It’s not about physical decoration but spiritual content. A classic case of “substance” over “form.”

Q: What are some applications of this situation to our own lives today?

A: It’s more important to have Christ in one’s ministry than “things” that merely dress up a ministry.

A: Having “Christ” as the central enticement is more important than the features of the earthly facilities we build.

in this place I will give peace,' declares the LORD of hosts."

¹⁰On the twenty-fourth of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Haggai the prophet, saying, ¹¹"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Ask now the priests for a ruling: ¹²If 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, will it become holy?'"

And the priests answered, "No."

¹³Then Haggai said, "If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will the latter become unclean?"

And the priests answered, "It will become unclean."

¹⁴Then Haggai said, "'So is this people. And so is this nation before Me,' declares the LORD, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean. ¹⁵But now, do consider from this day onward: before one stone was placed on another in the temple of the LORD, ¹⁶from 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. ¹⁷I smote you and every work of your hands with blasting wind, mildew and hail; yet you did not come back to Me,' declares the LORD. ¹⁸Do 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, consider: ¹⁹Is the seed still in the barn? Even including the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree, it has not borne fruit. Yet from this day on I will bless you.'"

[Read 2:10-19]

Note: This is the year when, according to Ezra 5, work on the temple resumed.

Q: What is the point God is trying to get across in the examples of v.11-13?

A: There is no middle ground between holiness and wickedness, between God's definition of "clean" and "unclean". And "holy" things will not make "unclean" things holy just by touching them.

Q: What has God continually taught throughout the Old Testament as the "cure" for uncleanness?

A: Obedience. (Psalm 51, for example.)

Q: Therefore, why has the remnant yet to experience God's physical blessings?

A: They first had to prove their obedience not simply by word but by their actions.

Possible Applications:

- Do we wait for God to answer our prayer and needs **BEFORE** we begin to obey Him in our walk?
- Not just giving to a building fund in advance of the building being built as a sign of our obedience, we need to "...*present our bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship...*" (Romans 12:1)

²⁰Then the word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying, ²¹“Speak to Zerubbabel governor of Judah, saying, ‘I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. ²²I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the power of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down, everyone by the sword of another.’ ²³On that day,’ declares the LORD of hosts, ‘I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you,’” declares the LORD of hosts.

[Read 2:20-23]

Q: What is a signet ring?

A: Simplest answer – a ring with the seal of the king’s authority.

Q: Is God speaking literally of Zerubbabel, that Zerubbabel will wear Gods’ signet ring? Who is God speaking of?

A: The Messiah through Whom the seed line comes through Zerubbabel who is in the direct line between David and Jesus.

Q: But in the example of Zerubbabel specifically, what is the word God uses to describe him in v.23 now that Zerubbabel has become obedient to God?

A: “My servant”.

Application: *God’s power and authority are born and transmitted in the course of ministry by those that are obedient to Him and beyond mere “things”, extending to the Spirit and working of God through the “things”.*

- **Message 1:** Answers are found running **TO** the Lord, not **FROM** Him.
- **Message 2:** Our ministry begins with changing our heart and attitude **NOW** as we prepare to assume the whole calling of God.
- **Message 3:** Our greatest ministry resource is Christ Himself.
- **Message 4:** We must make the first move in showing obedience through our actions.
- **Message 5:** These combine to form us into His servant Whose power and authority manifest themselves in the execution of our work for Him.

Remember: *In the inventory of God’s gifts that He gave to provide all the various functions of the body of Christ, none of them actually needs a building or a single physical resource to accomplish His ministry. They can all accomplish His work through obedience alone. We don’t need the building to begin equipping and carrying out His work now because **WE ARE** His building. (Homework: Look up the New Testament verse that supports this statement.)*