

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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Haggai 1:2-14 “The Time to Build Has Come”

Intro. This message of the prophet Haggai was preached in 520 B.C. This was after Nebuchadnezzar had plundered Jerusalem and taken the people captive into Babylon. For 70 years Israel suffered in exile. Then, Cyrus came to power as the leader of the Medo-Persian Empire. He defeated the Babylonians, and allowed the Israelites to return to their homeland. Ezra took about 50,000 Jews and returned to the Holy Land. The book of Ezra tells us that the first thing the people did was to rebuild the altar and start the sacrifices again (Ezra 3:2-3). They returned with a sense of repentance for the sins of their fathers that led to the destruction of Jerusalem. They sensed a need for sacrifice for their own sins.

We all need a sacrifice for sin, and the true sacrifice is none other than the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross. Have you come to Jesus with faith in His saving atonement? I trust that you have. But there is more to being a Christian than just receiving the forgiveness of sins. Once you are saved and converted, that is only the beginning. We need to live a life of obedience and commitment to the Lord. We need to put Christ first in our lives in all that we do. We need to worship Him regularly.

Soon after the Israelites built the altar, they laid the foundation to rebuild the temple. It was so important to rebuild that temple. The Temple would play a vital role in the survival of the faith of Israel in the post-Exilic period. Without the Temple, it is doubtful that the religion of Israel could have survived the onslaughts of a pagan world. But in spite of good intentions and some initial enthusiasm, they soon abandoned the work. For the next 15 years the people did nothing about the temple. They started out well in their renewed faith in the Lord, but they stopped short in full obedience.

Even so many today start out well, but they fall short in their Christian lives. When people first come to the Lord, they are excited about their new faith. But too many soon lose their enthusiasm. The same can be true of churches. Our church had a great start 29 years ago. There was much excitement in the early years. But the work fizzled out to a maintenance level. Then the work of God was renewed and we have accomplished much for the Lord. And now the time has come for us to take another big step as a church, and reach new heights for the Lord. It has been 15 years since we completed our last building. We have talked about a new building long enough. It is time for action.

I believe there are some principles that we can draw from Haggai chapter one that will help us move forward in our preparation to build. The first principle is a problem that we should avoid:

I. SO OFTEN WE POSTPONE OBEDIENCE TO GOD

This is what happened with the people of Israel. We read in v.2, “Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: ‘This people says, “The time has not come, the time that the LORD’S house should be built.”’” Basically, they were saying that it was not the Lord’s will to rebuild the temple at that particular time. In fact, they had been saying that for 15 years! Supposedly, it wasn’t that they were opposed to rebuilding the temple. They just said that the time isn’t right. So often if we do not want to do something, we will excuse ourselves by saying, “Now is not a good time.”

Have you been asked to serve the Lord in this church & you said, “It is not a good time; maybe next year.” Well when will it be a good time to sing in the choir, or serve as a deacon, or serve on that committee? Have you heard the Gospel & felt a need to trust Christ as Savior, and yet you said, “It is not a good time; perhaps later.” Last Sunday night I shared about Felix the governor. Paul witnessed to him about his need for Christ and he said, “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you” (Acts 24:25). Well I want you to know that postponing obedience to God is the same as disobedience.

Now when people make excuses for postponing obedience to God, they may feel they have pretty good reasons. Even so, the people of God in Haggai’s day probably thought that they had good reason to postpone construction of the temple. So I want to give 3 common reasons and a brief rebuttal to each:

A. Because It Is a Difficult Time - The people had returned with great anticipation, and their enthusiasm for rebuilding ran high. They had laid the foundation, but the difficulties seemed insurmountable. The economy was in bad shape, since they were recovering from the devastation that Babylon had brought. The cities and houses lay in rubble, the walls were torn down, and the land had been neglected for at least 50 years. The number of those who had returned from Exile was relatively small. Most stayed in Babylon & Persia. The Samaritans & other neighboring people were opposing them. Therefore they rationalized and decided that it was not the time to build. But just because something is difficult and hard and is going to cost you something, does that mean it is not the Lord’s will?

Some could have said that Pentecost wasn’t a good time to start the Church. They only had about 120 faithful members in Jerusalem. The religious leaders had recently crucified Jesus. But when the Holy Spirit fills a group of God’s people, it’s always a good time to do a work for God.

We too are living in uncertain days. The stock market recently took a big hit. The economy could take a downturn. Unemployment could go up. Our economy isn’t nearly as bad as it was in Haggai’s day, yet I’m sure some have thought with the Israelites, “The time is not come... that the Lord’s house should be built.” If we waited until all circumstances were favorable, we would never accomplish anything.

B. Because Other Matters Seem More Important – God asked in v.4, “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?” The people were putting the priority on their own houses. They were saying, “We have homes to build, children to educate, businesses to establish.” These are legitimate concerns. And it is true that your family should come before certain church activities and other matters. But you can take that to an extreme so that the Lord and His church are consistently made to be unimportant. Our attitude toward the church’s activities and buildings gives a message to our children and to others. What are we saying? Are we saying that church really isn’t important? Are we saying by our actions that TV and other things are more important than the worship of the Lord? In a 2005 Barna survey, only one out of every seven adults (15%) placed their faith in God at the top of their priority list. Other things seem more important to most people.

But Jesus said in Mt. 6:33, “Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.” When God is put first in our lives, all other things will take care of themselves. The things that people are after today may not be wrong, but it is wrong when they put them first in their lives and use them for their own selfish ends.

I believe that we should show by the use of our time, talents, and labor that the church is the most important place there is. Our facilities should say to this community that what we're doing here is important. We need to make sure that our priorities are in the right place. We too are prone to err in our allocation of priorities.

C. Because People Are Satisfied with the Way Things Are - They had already built an altar to the Lord. They may have built a tabernacle. Many felt that that was enough for now. The people had grown accustomed to living in a city without a Temple. They had become complacent. So often we are quite satisfied with going 2nd or 3rd class when it comes to the things of the Lord! The greatest enemy of progress is satisfaction with the way things are.

I'm sure some people feel that we should just make do with what we've got. Why go to all the expense of building a new building? Well if your house became crowded, wouldn't you want to either build an addition, or buy a larger house? Why should you be satisfied with less when it comes to God's house?

So here is Haggai 1 we see a group of God's people who have put the work of God on the back burner of their lives. Have you done that? Was there a time when you used to be far more active in serving, giving, and praying that you are now?

All of their excuses were invalid. They were simply out of God's will, and the Lord was displeased with their attitude and lack of action. So He sent the prophet Haggai to the people and appeals to them. So instead of postponing obedience to God:

II. WE SHOULD LISTEN TO GOD'S PROPHET

Haggai repeatedly refers to the Word of the Lord. He is making it clear that he is not speaking his own thoughts but is giving the Word of God to His people. And you know, that's my job. Every sermon I preach is based on the Word of God. You don't come here to hear Steve Felker; you come to hear the Word of God.

Notice how the prophet encourages the people to listen to the Word of God and respond. First:

A. He Appeals to their Mind – God says in v.4, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" He asks them to think about what is going on. You say the economy is bad, that circumstances are bad, and yet you have been able to build nice houses for yourselves! Now we would expect that they should have built for themselves shelter from the rain and cold. There is nothing wrong with providing a house for your family. But the problem was this: For 15 years, while they had been building for themselves beautifully paneled houses, the Lord's house had been in ruins.

The principle is very clear: We should not be willing to do less for the Lord than we do for ourselves. Our house of worship should be at least as nice and roomy as our own houses. A church building needs to be attractive in order to attract the sinner. King David said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells inside tent curtains" (2 Samuel 7:2). He did not feel right living in a nicer house than the Lord!

This sin is with us today, putting our own desires ahead of the will of the Lord. The weather is too bad to go visiting or to attend church, but not too bad for a hunting trip or a shopping trip! People will sit through a double-header baseball game and never complain, yet start to fidget if a church service runs 5 minutes overtime.

C.S. Lewis once said, “The only thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important.” If it’s really true, then it deserves everything you’ve got. A lot of people try to give God just part of their life. They say, “Well, I’ll serve God in my spare time.” It’s like I have this pie – I have my social life, and I have my career life, and I have my family life and over here my retirement life and over here I have my spiritual life — as if your spiritual life is one part of the pie. Wrong. He wants the whole pie to be under His control. He wants your whole being.

One application regarding our building program that I would like to make is this: We are asking our people to make a 3-year financial commitment to our building fund. We are not telling anyone how much you must give. We are challenging you to make a sacrifice, because that is what it takes to buy a home or to build a building. Now unless you are wealthy enough to pay cash up front, you have to make a financial commitment to buy a car or to buy a home. If you are willing to do that for yourself, then based on v.4 you should be willing to do the same for your Lord and for your church. We all make pledges. We make a pledge to the landlord or to the mortgage company so we can have a place to live. You make pledges when you buy anything on the installment plan. Are God and the work of God the only Person and the only thing that are of so little importance that you cannot risk making a pledge in order to help in Christian service?

B. He Appeals to their Heart - Twice in vv.5-7 the Lord says, “Consider your ways.” Literally the Hebrew reads, “Set your heart upon your ways.” He’s telling them to take a good, hard look at their lives. First, they were to think about:

1. Consider the Problems You Are Experiencing – In v.6 he asks them to consider that “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.” Their farms were so unproductive. We read why in vv.10-11, “Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. 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.” Furthermore, the wages they earned seemed to evaporate and disappear like money put in a bag with holes. Have you ever lost something due to a hole in your pocket? I have. So in spite of all their hard work, they were just not getting ahead. They took one step forward, and two steps back. They were putting their own interests ahead of God’s, but they weren’t getting anywhere. Nothing seemed to go right for the people.

There is no more telling description of the frustration of the self-centered life than that given here. The more you focus on your own happiness the more unhappy you become. A godless life is one of unsatisfied hunger and thirst. And even if you successfully feed your body you starve your soul. In fact, Psa. 106:15 says that the Lord, “gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul.”

Have you found yourself in a similar situation? Have you put a priority on making money, even above God & your family, and you just aren’t getting anywhere? Or perhaps you’re making more money than every before, but you feel like you have less than ever before. You feel like there’s holes in your pockets. Then you should consider your ways! When bad things happen, we should be willing to consider *why* they are happening? Actions have consequences, and consequences have causes. So you should not only think about the problems you are facing, but also:

2. Consider the Reasons for Your Problems – Why were they experiencing all these troubles? Haggai was sent by God to interpret the calamity. God spoke through him in v.9 saying,

“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. Then God gives them the reasons they were having such problems, “Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house.” They were having trouble because they were living in disobedience to God. Keeping everything for themselves and giving nothing to God had not resulted in greater prosperity but in greater poverty. Here is a double curse: instead of much, little was reaped, and the little that was brought home was blown away like chaff before the wind. God cannot bless you financially if you are neglecting to support His work. In Haggai’s day, God was chastening them concerning their material things, and they were not recognizing it as His judgment. Heb. 12:7 says, “If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?” Sometimes it feels like that the Lord is rubbing us with sandpaper; it can get rough at times. But we must realize that He is just trying to smooth the rough edges off our lives.

[Apply to America: much more crime, drug & alcohol abuse, divorce, etc. that in the 1950’s. Why?]

The problem was that the people did not recognize their troubles as being related to their disobedience. They were not considering their ways. They assumed it was just bad luck or a bad turn in circumstances. They thought that they had a good excuse in postponing the building of the temple, but that doesn’t make it right. Prov. 14:12 says, “There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”

Oh friend, don’t make the same mistake. When things so wrong in your life, do you consider your ways? What path are you taking? Where is that path leading you? Young lady, where is that young man leading you? Young man, where are those friends leading you? Where are you going in life? Sin will often bring a short time of pleasure, but the end of it will be suffering, broken hearts, and wrecked lives. God allows suffering into our lives to turn us back to Him. We all need to realize that we are worse off when we put ourselves ahead of the Lord.

Now I do not believe that every time bad things happen, that it means that God is punishing you or chastening you. We will in a fallen world where bad things happen even to the righteous. But when bad things happen to us, we should at least consider if we are going down the wrong path. We ought to turn to God’s Word, and seek a message from God. Then, if we realize that we have been on the pathway of disobedience, we should respond to the next appeal of Haggai:

C. He Appeals to their Will for Action - A remedy for the condition of v.6 is stated in v.8, “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. He is saying that it is time to get God’s work done. So God gives them a command to obey. It will involve a 3 step plan of obedience. First they would need to get the materials for the building. This would involve work. Going up to the mountain, felling the trees, and making them into lumber would take work and a great deal of effort. They could not expect the logs to roll down to them from the mountain. They had to climb the mountains, cut the logs, and bring them down. Even so, there are those today who teach that God is going to do some great miracle, and it would seem that God is going to build a building without any help from us. God works miracles, but that is not going to exempt us from our responsibility to work. All through the Bible the value of work is commended to us. If we are going to supply the materials for our new building, we too are going to have to work. We will not work to cut the materials, but many of us will need to work to earn the money to buy the materials. Don’t think for a minute that someone is going to come along and give us a million dollars for our building program in some miraculous

way. My friend, we are going to have to roll up our sleeves, and go to work for God. We can't sit on the sidelines and expect God or a few people to get the job done for us.

So having heard the appeals to our mind, heart, and will:

III. WE SHOULD RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

Thankfully, the people of Israel responded well to the preaching of Haggai. They were not like so many people, who do not give heed to the preaching of God's Word.

I heard the story of a deer hunter who took his preacher and family physician deer hunting. Both had never been before. They got up in the deer stand and waited. Sure enough, a deer came out within shooting range. He instructed them to aim and shoot when he did. They all shot at the same time, and immediately the deer fell to the ground. Each person claimed that they had shot the deer. The deer hunter told them to wait while he checked out the deer. He walked up to the deer, inspected his wounds, then yelled back, "I know who shot it. The preacher did. His bullet went in one ear and out the other!"¹

The people of Haggai's day did not ignore him, but listened, considered their ways, and acted upon the preaching of God's Word. That's the way it should be today. James 1:22 says, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only...." So how should we respond to God's Word?

A. By Obeying the Lord – That's what the people did in Haggai's day, and that's the response that God is looking for today. We read in v.12, "Then Zerubbabel² 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...." Now look at v.14, "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." Isn't that marvelous? The Lord spoke, and the people responded with action immediately. Within 3 weeks and a few days after his first address to the people they began work on the project!³ They were not just hearers of the Word, but doers! The greatest compliment you can give a preacher is for the preacher to see that you are putting into practice what he has been preaching. Samuel said, "...to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (I Sam. 15:22). They started giving priority to the work of God.

It is significant that the leaders of the people, Zerubbabel and Joshua, are mentioned first in their obedience to God. And I am calling on all the leaders of this church to be the first to respond to our *Together We Build* challenge. The general population also responded. This was a united response.

Now notice why the people obeyed. It was because "the people feared the presence of the LORD." Their fearing before the Lord presupposes that they saw their sin against God, and discerned in the drought a judgment from God. A healthy fear or respect of God is good for you. Furthermore, they were obedient because they realized that the prophet was indeed speaking the Word of God and not a mere word from a man. Finally, look at v.14. There we read that "the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel..., and the spirit of Joshua... and the spirit of all the

¹ Told by Frank Cox.

² He was the grandson of Jehoiachin, the exiled king of Judah (see 1 Chron. 3:17).

³ According to Ezra 6:15, the task was completed four years later, in the sixth year of Darius.

remnant of the people....” And I pray that God will stir up your spirit this morning to obey God, and trust God to do what He is calling you to do.

All I ask you to do is to be obedient to what the Lord will lead you to do in regard to our building program. Will you be obedient?

Secondly, we should respond:

B. By Trusting in the Lord’s Promise – In v.13 we read, “Then Haggai, the LORD’S messenger, spoke the LORD’S message to the people, saying, ‘I am with you, says the LORD.’” The task was great, but God promised to be with them to help them all along their way. When you obey God and place your faith in Him, I can assure you that you will not be alone. Many times in their nation’s past Israel’s went into battle, greatly outnumbered. But God promised to be with them, and He gave them the victory. Even so with God’s help, you can do more than you thought possible. Trust Him, and He will enable you to have a part in a great work. Sunday School teacher, you are not alone as you teach that class. Soloist, you are not alone as you sing for the Lord. Soul winner, you are not alone as you share your faith in Jesus Christ. And as you commit to support God’s work, you will not be alone. God will enable you to earn or acquire enough to give. He can be with you to minimize your losses. In Mal. 3:10-11 God says, “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this... 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. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field.”

Conclusion: Where have your priorities been lately? Have you put your own interests ahead of everything else? Have you been putting off a commitment to serve God, or to support His work? Have you put off giving your heart to Christ? Have you put off church membership? Have you suffered losses and a lack of satisfaction as a result? Forget the excuses. Consider your ways! It’s time to obey the Lord. It’s time to trust in the Lord. It’s time to put God first in your life. Again, Jesus said in Mt. 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” Put God first. Trust in Him, and He will meet your needs, and satisfy your soul.

Within the next few weeks we will be asking our members to make a commitment to support our building program. We are also inviting non-member believers to support our building program. I believe that God will be prompting many people to support this great endeavor. Will you be obedient to God? We read in the last of v.14, “they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God.” Will you work for God? Will you give to support His work? Will you trust God to enable you to give generously, and sacrificially?

Sources: Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972); Terry Harper (notes from his sermon on this text); C. F. Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, Minor Prophets, Vol. 10* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); Page H. Kelley, *Layman’s Bible Book Commentary: Micah-Malachi*, Vol. 14 (Nashville: Broadman, 1984); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 3 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text entitled, “Take a Good Look at Your Life” date 6/24/2001); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1993). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).