

Study Prophecy – Become Prophetic (10) Haggai: Rebuild the Temple

Just this past Tuesday, Fadi, Bill, and I were at the church. We met at 3 o'clock to meet with another contractor. He told us to do a walkthrough for our chapel restoration process. It took about an hour. And after the contractor left, the three of us sat down in Lambert Hall, discussing:

“Now what?”

“What is best for our church?”

We had three main concerns:

1. **The Mold Issue.** And praise God—it turned out it was not as serious as we thought! That is God's grace number one.
2. **Energy efficiency.** This is an old building, and we've been losing a lot of energy—especially in the summer and winter. As a result, our utility bills have been high. Looking toward the future, we want to make this building more energy-efficient so that we can be better stewards of what God has entrusted to us.
3. **Historic preservation.** This chapel is not just any building. It is the oldest church structure in the Great Falls area that has continuously served as a holy space for 135 years. What we do *not* want is to tear everything down and replace it with plastic and steel. The challenge is how to restore the building while honoring its history.

As you can imagine, it was not an easy conversation. We scratched our heads more than once. And when we found ourselves with more questions than answers, thank God, we had someone to call—we called Glen.

Glen graciously spent over an hour on the phone with us, answering questions, offering insight, and helping us gain clarity. It truly helped.

By the time the conversation ended, it was already dark outside. We had started at three; now it was past six. We closed our time with prayer. And a prayer like this came out of my mouth:

“Lord, thank You for sending people like Glen, Fadi, Bill, and Santos in a season like this in the life of Smith Chapel. Thank You for using them to serve You and continue to advance Your Kingdom through this church.”

In my mind, I was so grateful for them.

And I am grateful for all of you—because even though you were not in that meeting, but I know that you love this church. You pray for this church. And you do everything you can to support this work to rebuild our chapel.

Today, we’re going into our tenth book in the minor prophets: Haggai.

I find this book incredibly timely, because we are literally in the process of rebuilding God’s temple.

Haggai’s core message is simple:

“God’s house is in ruins. My friends, let’s do something about it.”

Let us pray.

Understanding Haggai’s Moment - Return – Hope – Opposition – Delay

To understand Haggai, we must understand his moment in history.

Haggai is one of the **post-exilic prophets**, along with Zechariah and Malachi.

Here, “Post-exilic” means *after the exile*.

And here’s what’s going on in his time.

In 539 BC, which sounds not too long ago, Persia conquered Babylon. Who is Babylon? Earlier, they conquered Judah, destroyed their temple in Jerusalem, and took many of them as war slaves. But once Persia took over Babylon, something unthinkable happened.

Cyrus, the king of Persia, issued a decree allowing the Jewish exiles to return home and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. My friends, that’s God’s work, intervening in human history. God promised that after 70 years of Babylonian captivity, God will

redeem His people, and indeed, He did – by using very unlikely person: the king of Period.

Fast forward, in 536 BC, the first group returned home.

I want you to imagine that moment. After seventy years of exile, stepping back into your homeland. How would you feel if that was you? Probably, joy, excitement, awe, tears, and fear—all mixed together.

So, the people came back to Jerusalem with tears in their eyes and the first thing they need to do is clear the rubble and rebuild God's temple.

At first, everything seemed to go smoothly. They cleaned up the mess. They set the altar. And they laid the foundation of the temple.

The air was light. Their hearts were filled with hope.

But then trouble came.

(Say with me – uh oh!)

Opposition came from surrounding neighbors. The Samaritans and others—they didn't want Jerusalem to rise again. They launched a campaign of fear. They bribed officials. They even wrote letters to the new King in Persia at the time, whose name is Artaxerxes (알타-절-씨스), spreading lies. They said, *“King, if you let them build this temple and these walls, they will stop paying taxes. These are rebellious people. If you let them build, you will lose control of this region.” (Ezra 4:12-16)*

Unfortunately, the king believed the lie.

So, he sent a new decree: **Stop the work.**

So, the work stopped.

Not for just one year.

Not for two years.

But for **sixteen years.**

Friends, sixteen years is a long time. During these years, probably, not just weeds but trees might be growing through the cracks in the foundation. The altar they sat exposed to sun and rain.

But here is the thing. Even though rebuilding God's temple was stopped, yet their lives still went on. People married. Had children. Started businesses. Built and renovated their homes.

And whenever they might have faced some uneasy feelings, looking at the God's temple being unfinished, immediately, they might have made an excuse like:

"Well, you know, the King of Persia issued that decree. It's obviously not God's will right now."

"The political climate isn't right."

"The economy is tough."

"We know it's important, but... the time has not yet come."

That exact phrase appears in Haggai 1:2:

"This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'These people say, 'The time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house.''"

Come to think of it, sometimes we say that, too, right?

"The time has not yet come."

"I'll serve God when I get that promotion."

"I'll tithe when I pay off my car."

"I'll volunteer when my schedule gets easier."

These people knew why God had brought them back to their homeland. They knew what their mission was about – to rebuild His temple. But obedience was postponed – even 16 years.

And that is where Haggai enters the story.

Paneled Houses and Misplaced Priorities

Haggai's message is short, straightforward, and piercing.

God asks in verse 4:

"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"

That word **paneled** matters. It implies comfort—even luxury. These panels were often made of **cedar**: tall, strong, long-lasting, fragrant wood used for royal palaces. In modern terms, it's like upgrading our homes with hardwood floors, designer lighting, smart-home systems, and top-of-the-line appliances—while God's house is neglected.

Here, you have to understand that God is not condemning survival. He is confronting **misplaced priorities**.

These people were busy—but not centered.

Probably, they were faithful people—but distracted.

Once you ask them, “Do you believe in God?” They will say, “Of course! I believe in God—and yet, they were postponing obedience.”

What about us?

Think about this question for a moment:

Where have we chosen comfort over obedience?

Where have we been so busy with our own lives that we've neglected God's mission?

Haggai repeats this phrase five times.

He declares:

“Give careful thought to your ways.”

In other words, *pause for a moment*.

Take an honest look at your life, and mirror yourself to the Word of God.

Then God names their frustration:

He says: “*You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.*” (1:5)

Friends, do you know that feeling? You work harder and harder, but it feels like you’re not getting anywhere. You buy something you really wanted, but the happiness fades quickly. You get a bonus—yay!—but soon, you realize it’s all gone; and you wonder, ‘Where did all my money go?’ Do you ever had that feeling? (I do).

God says: connects the dots.

God says your hardships and your empty feelings are not just random coincidence. Then He says: (“This is what the Lord Almighty says:) “Give careful thought to your ways. … “You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?” declares the Lord Almighty. “Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. …” (1:6-11)

Catch the heart of the message here:

When we push God to the margins of our lives, the center of our lives falls apart. Our hardworking may feel like spinning the wheels if our priorities are disordered. It’s like we are trying to find life apart from the Source of Life.

So, when God says, “Rebuild My temple” it’s not really about the building, it was really about **re-centering their lives**.

Jesus said it plainly:

“*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*” (Matthew 6:33)

Beloved, life cannot flourish when God is treated as an accessory instead of the center.

So, when we read Haggai, we need to be extremely careful – because the conversation can easily end up with saying, “Okay, so, God’s Words today says, ‘We need to build the church building, period.’ No, that’s not the whole point.

Haggai is not saying buildings are everything—and also note this. He’s not saying, either, that they don’t matter at all.

Buildings do matter, because we are embodied people. We are not just spiritual beings like angels; we are physical people who need real spaces to gather, worship, and serve.

At times, repairing a church building can be an act of obedience no less faithful than praying inside it.

But still, we must not make any mistake of thinking that God’s temple is only about the building.

Think about this. Many years later, Jesus stood in Jerusalem and said, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*” (John 2:19) He was speaking about His body. Jesus Himself is the true temple. And through His death and resurrection, He calls us, as believers, to become His body—the church. My friends, **we are now God’s temple.**

So, this song rings the truth:

**The church is not a building,
the church is not a steeple,
the church is not a resting place,**

the church is a people.

I am the church!

You are the church!

We are the church together!

All who follow Jesus,

all around the world!

Yes, we're the church together!

This week, I was reminded of that truth.

Early Thursday morning, I received a message that Elizabeth Yoon had been taken to the ER. Her family was out of town, and she needed help. I went to the hospital. Thank God, it was not life-threatening. She had fractured her collarbone and needed assistance at home.

So I started calling people. One call led to another. And within a couple of hours, people were showing up to help. It was God-moment.

Later that day, coming back home, I found there was a heavy traffic. So, to avoid and to rest a bit, I went into the Barnes & Noble. The moment I just entered in, I received another message—now, JC's mother in Korea had passed away. What a day! I called him. Then, I sat there in the corner of the bookstore, on my laptop, and started writing messages to ask the Smith Chapel family to pray together for our dear members who were in a difficult time.

The point is this:

- When I was sitting with Elizabeth in the hospital—**was it a church?** Yes.
- When I was taking her back to her house, driving my car—**was it a church in my car?** Yes.
- When our members were making phone calls and text messaging the people they knew who could help her—**was that a church?** Yes.

- When I was writing a message to ask for your prayers at the Barnes & Noble—**was it a church? Yes.**
- When you were praying in your places, in your kitchen, in your car, in your bedroom, in your workplace—**was that a church? Yes.**
- **And now, we're worshipping online – is this a church? Yes!!**

You get my point, right? **We are the church. Church is not a building.**

We need a building—yes! And we're so glad that we have one that is so sweet and lovely.

But the building itself is not the church.

A building without love, without grace, without mercy;
 a building without true repentance;
 a building without true worship of God;
 a building without the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ—
 is that truly a church?

Is that the body of Christ?

The answer is, no.

Yes, God calls us to rebuild His Temple, but it's not just a building, it's a loving community united in His love and with one another, worshipping and following Jesus.

Let me share this and wrap up the message.

It was yesterday. I was on another call with Bill, discussing about our church situation. Towards the end of the call, he said something that truly touched my heart. He said,

“Pastor, I’m sorry.”

“Huh? Why?”

“I’m sorry because you have to deal with this. When you responded to God’s call into the ministry, you probably expected to deal with the sick people—but not a sick

building. If our church were bigger, we might have a committee to handle all this, so you wouldn't have to. I'm sorry."

It really touched my heart.

I told him, "Bill, I appreciate what you said. I really do. But this is exactly why God sent people like you. Without you all, I wouldn't have done this."

Soon after we hung up the call, I realized there was something I didn't say to him—and I want to say it now.

"Bill, I'm sorry you have to deal with this."

And to all of you—"I'm sorry you have to deal with this. Because if you were part of a large, well-programmed, perfectly organized church, you might never have to think about mold issues, or anything that might have given you a headache these days. So, I'm so sorry for what you are going through in this church. ... And thank you."

Today, God wants us to hear this message through the prophet Haggai.

"Be strong. Do not fear. I am with you."

"The glory of this present house will be greater than the former."

"From this day on, I will bless you."

So, rebuild my temple. Not just this building, but loving community who truly loves God and one another.

My friends,

"This is hard work—but it is holy work, and it is our mission."

So, let's gather up.

Let's bring our tools, our gifts—prayer, generosity, service, presence.

And remember:

We are not carrying this alone.

We have each other.

And above all, we have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who goes before us, besides us, and right behind us.

So, let's rebuild the temple.

Let's be the church—**here and everywhere.**

Amen.

Reflection Question

This week, ask the Holy Spirit:

“What part of Your house—my life, my church, my community—are You asking me to help rebuild?”