



Sunday, July 3, 2022: "Haggai Calls for Faithful Service"
Commentary (The UGP Curriculum)

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Lesson Text: Haggai 1:1-11; **Time of Action:** 520 B.C.;
Place of Action: Jerusalem

Golden Text: "Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?" (Haggai 1:3-4).

I. INTRODUCTION. This week's lesson is all about priorities. When Haggai called on the returning exiles to Israel to "*consider your ways,*" he was calling on them to think about their life priorities, and in particular where did God fit in those priorities. Too often in this world, even Christians get caught up in worldly things and put God in a position that He will not tolerate. He has to be first in our lives and He will not settle for anything less. Like Israel, many of us lack things we want because we put those things before God. If we want to see a reversal of our situations, maybe we should remember Jesus' words in His Sermon on the Mount: *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*" (see Matthew 6:33). In this week's lesson, Haggai reminded God's people that their losses were a result of their failure to properly prioritize God's place and His will in their lives.

II. THE LESSON BACKGROUND. No task is ever



completed that is never started. However, for some people the biggest problem is not starting a job but finishing what they start. The Jews who returned to Judah after the Babylonian Captivity needed encouragement about perseverance. When King Cyrus of Persia issued his edict permitting the Jews to return to their home land (see Ezra 1:1-4), over 42,000 responded (see Ezra 2:64-65). They laid the foundation for the temple (see Ezra 3:1-13), but opposition from surrounding peoples quickly arose and the people stopped the rebuilding effort (see Ezra 4:1-24). The first group of returnees arrived in Israel in 538 B.C., but because of the opposition from their enemies, the work was halted for about 16 years until Haggai delivered God's message to rebuild the temple. In this week's lesson, the people didn't think that the time had come to continue to rebuild God's house. However, through His prophet, God's word to rebuild went forth. It was most important that God's people obey His command to rebuild the temple and answer "*Haggai's call for Faithful Service.*"

III. GOD REBUKES HIS PEOPLE FOR DISOBEDIENCE **(Haggai 1:1-6)**

A. The historical setting (Haggai 1:1). Our first verse says **"In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying."**



The prophet "**Haggai**" was very careful to give the exact time when he received "**the word of the LORD**" meaning God's message to His people. "**Haggai**" writes that he received this message from God "**In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month.**" This would have been the Hebrew month of Elul which corresponds roughly to our months of August-September. The "**first day**" of each Jewish month was the day of the new moon and had special spiritual significance (see Numbers 28:11-15). All business was suspended like it was on the Sabbath (see Amos 8:5) and a special burnt offering was brought before the LORD. As a result, this was an appropriate time for "**Haggai**" to give his message to those assembled in Jerusalem. God's prophecy to "**Haggai**" was directed to "**Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest.**" "**Darius the king**" refers to "**Darius**" I the Great, who reigned as king of Persia from 522 to 485 B.C. He was also known as "**Darius**" Hystaspis or "**Darius**," son of Hystaspis. He continued Cyrus the Great's policy of restoring the Jewish people to their homeland. In his second year as king, the Jews continued work on the unfinished temple in Jerusalem and "**Darius**" assisted by sending a generous subsidy to help in restoring the temple (see Ezra 6:1-12). "**Zerubbabel**" was the civil leader appointed "**governor**" of Judah by King Cyrus. He was also a descendant of King Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah; see I Chronicles 3:16-19), the last in David's line to be king of Judah (see II Kings 24:15). "**Joshua**" was the religious leader and the son of "**Josedech**" who was the "**high priest**" when the Captivity took place (see I Chronicles 6:15;



Ezra 3:2). These two Israelite leaders were especially mentioned because they would be needed to help persuade the people to continue to rebuild the temple.

B. A false view of timing (Haggai 1:2). Haggai continued his message in this verse saying **"Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built."** Although Haggai gave God's message to Joshua and Zerubbabel, the civil and religious leaders, it was directed to all the people. It's interesting that the Israelites were not called God's people as they normally were, but God referred to them as **"This people"** indicating His displeasure with them. They were of the mind that **"The time is not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built."** But why was it not the time? No one told them to stop building the temple. Their attitude about completing the temple revealed their spiritual condition. After all, the temple was crucial to Jewish life and worship. Yes, the previous Persian ruler, Artaxerxes had stopped the construction during his reign (see Ezra 4:21-24), but there was no hindrance at this time so they had no excuse. **Note: No doubt the people's contention that this was not the time to continue building the temple grew out of the unfavorable political circumstances that they faced shortly after the work started (see Ezra chapter 4). They had experienced harassment through threats causing discouragement and a stoppage of the construction. However, by hastily giving in to those circumstances showed that the Jews' priorities were badly misplaced.**



C. A question about their timing (Haggai 1:3-4).

1. (vs. 3). This verse says **"Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying."** This statement is made in order to stress the importance of the divine origin of the question that God was about to ask in the next verse. Again, God's message was given to **"Haggai the prophet."** We know very little about him apart from what is said about him in the book of **"Haggai."** We do know that he and Zachariah prophesied during the same time (see Ezra 5:1). A study of the book of **"Haggai"** reveals that the prophet had a two-fold ministry. He was to rebuke and encourage. The people were rebuked for not continuing the work on the temple, and they were encouraged to begin to build it again.

2. (vs. 4). The question that the LORD directed to the leaders and the people through Haggai was **"Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?"** The people were saying that it was not time to build the LORD's house (see vs. 2), but God responded with a question to them: **"Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?"** This question says something about the life-style of the people. They were living luxuriously in **"ceiled"** or paneled houses. The wealthier Jews spared no expense in decorating their homes, but they didn't have any time to build God's house. The prophet wasn't speaking against the nice homes the people lived in. He condemned them for neglecting the house of God which was lying in **"waste"** or *"in ruins"* while they had plenty. The condition of the temple



couldn't be blamed on the Captivity any longer. It could have and should have been rebuilt. **Note:** *When the Jews returned to Judah under Cyrus' decree, he charged them to build God's house (see Ezra 1:2-3). He had even instructed those who remained in Babylon to contribute generously to this project (see Ezra 1:4). Cyrus also returned 5400 gold and silver temple vessels that had been taken from the original temple (see Ezra 1:6-11). In addition, some of those who returned contributed generously when they arrived (see Ezra 2:68-70). So there was plenty available to be used in completing the temple. We can only wonder what happened to much of this wealth after the temple construction was stopped. Did they use it for their own homes? Who knows? It was supposed to be used for the temple construction and nothing else. Priorities had changed and worship of the LORD no longer seemed important.*

D. A challenge to rethink their timing (Haggai 1:5-6).

1. (vs. 5). Haggai continued to say in this verse **"Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways."** This was a call for God's people to self-examine themselves. In other words, they were to think about how they treated the LORD's house was affecting their lives. The next verse tells us what God expected His people to **"consider"** or think about.

2. (vs. 6). In this verse, the consequences of the



people's "ways" (see verse 5) were spelled out in detail as the prophet said **"Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes."** Because the people had not given God first place in their lives, their labors were not fruitful. This is what is meant by the statement **"Ye have sown much, and bring in little."** They had done everything necessary to ensure a good harvest, but their fields were not productive. Moses had predicted that this would be the result if people neglected God (see Deuteronomy 28:15, 38-42). In addition, the prophet said **"ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm."** In other words, even the basic necessities of life were not being supplied. Their food, **"drink"** and **"clothing"** were not sufficient (see Leviticus 26:23-26; Hosea 4:10). Not only were basic needs not being met, God also said **"and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes."** This means that the **"wage"** earner couldn't accumulate anything through his work; it was as if he was putting his **"wages"** in **"a bag"** full of **"holes."** This may have happened because the prices of goods a person bought were so high; but also they may have developed such expensive tastes that their **"wages"** didn't stay with them long. **Note: God has interesting ways of dealing with those who rob Him in order to enrich themselves. He allows their self-centered desires to grow faster than their abilities can satisfy them. He leaves an empty space in them that will remain until they return to Him. God asks His children to put Him**



and His kingdom first (see Matthew 6:33). Then He obligates Himself to provide for all our needs including the economic basics that so many worry about (see Luke 12:22-34).

IV. GOD'S RESPONSE TO HIS PEOPLE'S ATTITUDE (Haggai 1:7-11)

A. God's will declared (Haggai 1:7-8).

1. (vs. 7). Again, the prophet in this verse says **"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways."** As he did in verse 5, Haggai repeated the exhortation **"Consider your ways."** This was a second call to action. The people again needed to think about their behavior towards God and His house.

2. (vs. 8). Now God's instructions to the people in this verse was to **"Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD."** After commanding the people to consider their ways (see verses 5 & 7), God told them what they needed to do in order to please Him, namely gathering materials and finishing the temple. They were instructed to **"Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house."** Since no particular **"mountain"** is named, it seems proper to conclude that this refers to mountainous regions in general where timber grew in abundance. Evidently, the mountains provided the best source of wood. **Note: *Although wood***



was a major ingredient needed for building the temple, this command didn't exclude the gathering of other materials as well. Some of the stones of the former temple could probably be reused, but additional stones would have to be hewed to finish the walls (see Ezra 5:8). Whatever materials were needed, the call went out to gather them and build. The last phrase in this verse gives God's promise in response to the people's obedience in building the temple. God promised **"and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD."** The LORD would be pleased that His people had set aside their selfish desires and were giving Him the place He deserves. However, God's pleasure and His glorification depended upon their obedience to the commands He had given. True worship doesn't focus on the blessings that can be gained by the worshippers (although there are spiritual benefits), but it focuses on the glory that God receives. To **"glorify"** God is to give Him the credit and honor He deserves because of who He is and what He has done.

B. God's chastening explained (Haggai 1:9). In this verse God said **"Ye looked for much, and, lo it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house."** At this time, God wasn't being glorified by His people nor was He pleased. Therefore, through Haggai God explained why things had gone so badly for them. The words **"Ye looked for much"** reveals the great expectations they had for their harvests. The phrase **"and, lo it came to little"** refers to the small amount of produce the crops



brought forth which was a great disappointment to them. But this was only part of their problem. God also said **"when ye brought it (the harvest) home, I did blow upon it."** It's quite possible that when the people stored their crops, God sent storms to destroy their barns, thus destroying their harvest. The phrase, **"Why? saith the LORD of hosts"** (or LORD of armies) indicates that God was about to tell His people why they were having all the troubles they faced. The people may have assumed that their losses were the result of natural causes, but the LORD said it was **"Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house."** The reason why the people were experiencing hardships and loss of their crops was because they had neglected God's **"house"** and His work while they lived for themselves in luxury. But isn't concern for ourselves a major reason why we sometimes neglect God's work? Maybe we need to *"consider our ways"* as well.

C. God's actions detailed (Haggai 1:10-11).

1. (vs. 10). This verse says **"Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit."** Still responding to what was happening to His people because they neglected His house, God said **"Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew"** meaning that God had even withheld the **"dew"** from **"heaven."** Imagine waking up each morning and there is no **"dew"** on the ground. In addition, **the earth is stayed from her fruit."** This means that their land didn't bring forth any harvest or crops.



2. (vs. 11). In our final verse God said **"And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands."** God said that He caused **"a drought"** or lack of water on everything. The word **"corn"** refers to all kinds of grains. The words, **"new wine"** refers to grapes used to make **"wine,"** and **"oil"** refers to olives from which olive **"oil"** was made. Each of these items made up Israel's major crops. The people depended on these while neglecting the worship of God. As a result, the LORD said that He sent **"a drought"** to destroy their livelihood and to bring them back to Him. All of these catastrophes that Israel suffered were the price they paid for their disobedience and unfaithfulness.

V. Conclusion. Haggai's challenge from the LORD was simple and direct. It was time to put God first and rebuild the temple. God doesn't want us to build a temple, but He does want us to put Him first in our lives and give Him faithful service. When we put Him first in our lives, we know that He will be glorified and that He will be there to give us the help and strength we need. We should regularly check our priorities and rearrange them if necessary so that God really does have first place in our lives.



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