

## **Let Us Build the House of God** *The Book of Haggai*

### **Build the House of God!** *Haggai 1:1 – 2:23*

#### **Introduction: Putting First Things First**

In the past year, I made two decisions that I'd like to see become a general pattern in my life. In mid 1997, I was starting my fourth year doing project scheduling in Intel. It's not a glamorous position by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, my job is pretty mundane. Every week, there is a weekly cycle of tasks that I do over and over. Here is where I learned about the repetitive meaningfulness of work, which we studied in Ecclesiastes. Now in late 1997, a position opened up. It was the position of traveling internal consultant and trainer. That job was offered first to me because I knew the subject matter well, and because I was a young, single guy who should have been open to the glamorous life of the traveling consultant. I would have even went to Intel's site in Haifa, Israel for some time. It was also a position that would have led to some high visibility and a big raise if I did the job right. There was only one problem: I had made commitments to be involved in ministry to children and the Gonzalez and Chavez families in East Palo Alto, to discipling a young man at Stanford, teaching here, and some friendships at work were turning into possibilities for sharing the gospel. If I were going to be serious about those relationships, then I had to stay put. Now I know most of my peers would have jumped at that opportunity, and sure enough, they did when I turned it down.

The second decision was more difficult. In March, a position in management opened up in an organization that needed a lot of work. I've always wanted a managerial position, but the organization needed so much work it would have been impossible to keep reasonable or regular hours. I thought about this one for longer. If I wanted to be successful and responsible in that new position, I could do it, but it would take a lot of extra work. So I told my superiors at that time, no. I had other commitments that were important. I needed the freedom to reflect, relate with people, and let Jesus have free rein over more of my life.

Now in the Silicon Valley work environment, and at Intel particularly, those decisions were huge. But, as a general pattern, those are the decisions that I would like to see myself make more and more. These are the decisions that build the house of God. They are not the decisions that build my own personal career, or my own personal house. But, this is the general pattern I would like for your life as well, because the overarching command in the Scriptures is: Build the house of God. This is especially true in the book of Haggai.

#### **Historical Background: Ezra 1 – 6**

Let's set the stage. In the year 538 B.C., King Cyrus of Persia permitted the first wave of Jewish refugees to return from Babylon to the land of Israel. It was a momentous occasion, because for 70 years, they hadn't seen their homeland. But now, as they hiked out of the Jordan River valley, they saw the ruined city of Jerusalem and the ruined Temple of God. It was as if they were immigrants building their lives up from scratch. A man named Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, led them, along with Joshua the high priest. In the second year back, they rebuilt the altars and laid the foundations for the Temple. They reinstated worship, they're praising and singing to God, and a shout of joy goes up from the younger generation because they're looking at the foundation of the Temple, but the people in the older generation weep, because they remember the grandeur of Solomon's Temple, and they long for it. But then an odd thing happened: opposition came. Some Samaritans who had devised their own false version of worship came to help them. They were rebuffed by Zerubbabel and Joshua and the other leaders of the families. But after the Samaritans left, insulted, they decided to undermine the work of the faithful remnant of Israel. They made menacing and underhanded threats, and eventually sent a letter to the new king of Persia, Artaxerxes, to get him to stop the rebuilding project. King Artaxerxes wrote a decree that forced the Jews to stop building the Temple. And work on the Temple came to a screeching halt.

There was an eighteen year hiatus during which the Israelites focused solely on rebuilding their own homes and their own lives. In those days, times were hard: the crops were lean, they were surrounded by antagonistic neighbors, and they were few in number. They must have felt very afraid, not with the kind of fear that is obvious, but the subtle kind, the kind that drains your energy slowly and trembles just under your voice.

Then in the year 520 B.C., God appointed a man, probably a wise old man in his eighties, to speak and preach His word to that generation. That man was named Haggai the prophet, and his book is what we're going to study.

The book of Haggai is a collection of 4 sermons preached by Haggai over a period of about 4 short months. The first sermon was delivered on August 29, 520; it goes from 1:1 – 15. The second was given on October 17; it goes from 2:1 – 9. The third was given on December 18 and goes from 2:10 – 19. The fourth was also given on December 18 and goes from 2:20 – 23. He had one basic message throughout his ministry: Resume the building of God's house. Stop putting yourselves first. Put God first. Build the Temple of God.

### **The First Sermon: Build the Temple! 1:1 – 11**

Let's look at the first message beginning in v.1. It's to the leadership, Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest. "In 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." How interesting that God addresses the leadership first. Eighteen years ago, these two men had courageously stood their ground against the false worship and the false support of the Samaritans. But now, these two men have retreated into fear, and they are no longer leading the people. So what are the people saying?

God says in v.2, "This people says, 'The time has not come, even the time for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt.'" God is repeating what the people are saying. After having given in to fear, the Israelites are not excusing it with pseudo-spiritual reasons to not do what is on God's heart. They're interested in being financially secure, not taking any risks, and they're even giving a pious excuse to put their own agenda first.

This statement is so classic. If they were Americans in 1998 they might say, "The time has not come. I'm a young adult. I've been in school for about 18 years or more! And now is the time where God must want me to establish my career. This is not the time to put God first." Do we say that? In our day and age, with materialism on the one hand and loose Biblical interpretation on the other, we find Christians giving hyper spiritualized excuses for our fear. We might fool ourselves by rehearsing these lines to ourselves every week. But we don't fool God for a second.

And God sees right through the Israelites' excuses. What does He do to wake them up from their complacent laziness? He turns the tables on them with a piercing question in v.4, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?" Notice that God turns around the excuse of the Israelites. They said the time is not right for God. God says the time is not right for you yourselves. They said they would focus on their houses above His. God says to focus on His house above theirs. They're staring at the same cards they tried to play.

Then comes the call in v.5 to examine their priorities: Consider your ways! "Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Consider your ways!'" That command occurs twice in rapid succession. Once in v.5 and once in v.7. Another way to phrase that is, THINK ABOUT WHAT YOUR PRIORITIES HAVE BEEN, LOOK AT WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOU! God tells them to examine themselves and what they've done. What has happened is: EMPTINESS in v.5-11

Consider your ways!

You have sown much, but harvest little,

You eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied,

You drink, but there is not even 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."

Thus says the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways!

Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the Temple,

that I may be pleased with it and be glorified, says the Lord

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.

Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew, and the earth has withheld its produce.

And I 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.

For the past eighteen years, God has been trying to get their attention. There hasn't been any good harvests. No good crop. There's no good weather! God's been holding back His blessing on the nation. They lack grain and other crops, wine and other drinks, oil, cattle, warmth, and rain. They weren't even getting the nice dew that sparkles on your grass in the morning. Now God wanted to give great blessings to Israel (eg. Leviticus 26:19, Deuteronomy 33:13-15). But when His presence is not there, life is not abundant; it's meager, and it's sad. Their lives have been getting parched like a desert, so God sends Haggai to wake them up with the message: **CONSIDER YOUR WAYS! YOUR PRIORITIES ARE ALL MIXED UP! LOOK AT WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOU!**

Now in our case, the abundance we lack would be spiritual riches in the heart. Why do our spiritual lives often feel so barren and empty? Because we are not building His Temple; we are following our own agenda.

Now in v.12-15, the people of Israel do something amazing. "Then Zerubbabel...and Joshua...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." The leadership obeyed, the people followed, and everyone in their hearts put God first.

In response to this very wise choice, the Lord sends them great encouragement. "Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke by the commission of the Lord to the people saying, "I am with you," declares the Lord." That is the secret of success in the Hebrew Scriptures: God present in your day to day reality. His presence means life for you, and His work in and through you will be accomplished amidst great blessing and miraculous power. This is certainly true for us today, because God is with us by His indwelling Spirit.

Sure enough, within 23 days, the entire group of Israelites is galvanized into action. "So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel...and the spirit of Joshua...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, on the twenty fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of Darius the king." This is amazing and beautiful. Previously, the history of Israel was to be stubborn and set in their ways. But in a mere 23 days, the leadership has a change of heart, and the people also have a change of heart.

### **The Second Sermon: God's House Will Be Glorious: 2:1 – 9**

Now about a month later, the people hit another kind of roadblock. After building for almost a month, the people have probably erected the skeleton of the Temple. And as they looked at how much work they had left, they felt weighed down. Maybe they sat around like discouraged construction workers, saying, "The Temple is just a shadow of its former self. After all, Solomon in all his glory and wealth built the first Temple. We don't have a fraction of the resources Solomon did. And even with Solomon, it took seven years to build! We're over budget, understaffed, and behind schedule. And even if we build this thing in our lifetime, is God's shekinah glory even going to come back to be among us? We don't even have the ark of the covenant!"

So the Lord sends Haggai with another message of incredible encouragement in 2:1-5. "On the twenty first of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet saying, "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, "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? But now take courage, Zerubbabel," declares the LORD, "take courage also, Joshua the 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," says the LORD of hosts. "As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!"

Now if you're anything like me, you're asking, "Well that's great. But why? What is so important about the Temple? Wasn't it just a building?" Maybe the Israelites were asking this question, too. So what does God do? God opens up the future to them to show them that their work is truly significant. In fact, this work is crucial. Verses 6-9 speak to that concern.

Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth,  
the sea also and the dry land.

And I will shake all the nations;

and they will come [to the desire of nations.]

And I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts.

The silver is mine, and the gold is mine.

The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts, and in this place I shall give peace, declares the Lord of hosts.

What is this Temple all about? Let's dissect this. When God uses the phrases "the heavens and the earth" and "the sea also and the dry land" He is poetically saying "the whole created order." God is going to do something that turns the whole order of things upside down. Hebrews 12:26 applies this phrase to Jesus Christ inaugurating the unshakable kingdom of God beginning with the church. Thus, the shaking of the whole created order refers to Jesus Christ's first coming.

Why? Because God was shaking the old creation order and beginning a new creation order. Up until then, God had only dwelled AMONG human beings. When Israel wandered around in the wilderness, they lived in tents called tabernacles. And God declared to Moses that the Shekinah glory of God would also dwell in a tabernacle among the people. Then Israel settled in houses in the land, and God told David and Solomon to build him a house, so that He could dwell among the people. Now these Israelites were rebuilding that Temple out of sticks and stones, clay and brick. And after years and years of God's patience, He would finally walk into that Temple in bodily form, in Jesus Christ, and say, "Destroy this temple [my body], and I will raise it up in three days." Jesus Christ became the new Temple, the new place where God dwells WITHIN human beings.

We are a part of this new creation. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19 that if we have faith in Christ, then we have replaced the Temple as the new dwelling places of God, because the Spirit of God now lives in us. We individually are Temples! But that's not all. Not only are we Temples individually, but all together, all believers are joined together as one Temple corporately. (1 Peter 2 and Ephesians 2)

And this living Temple goes beyond Israel to include the Gentiles. Haggai says in v.7, "And I will shake all the nations, and they will come with the wealth of all nations." That's shown in a progression, first when the Gentile magi come from to Israel and one by one, lay the gold, frankincense, and myrrh at Jesus' baby feet, second when the Gentiles seek Jesus at the last Passover in John 12 and Jesus says, "The hour has come," third when Simon Peter unleashes the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles at Joppa in Acts 10, fourth when Paul collects a huge famine relief fund from the Gentile Christians and brings it back to Jerusalem, and finally in the end times when the Gentiles stream to Jesus Christ in Jerusalem bringing the wealth of nations. (Isa.60:5).

(I believe that v.8, where God lays claim to the silver and gold, tilt the scales in favor of this interpretation. However, many rabbis like the great sage Rashi and also the authors of *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament* (pg.237) translate it "they will come to the desire of nations." The "desire of nations" is a title of Messiah because the Gentiles desire him. This also unfolds in a progression, first in John 12 when certain Gentiles came to Jerusalem after Palm Sunday and wanted to see Jesus, right before the Passover Feast, second when the Gentiles enter the church in Acts 10 beginning with Cornelius, and finally in full in the church age ever since then.)

So this beleaguered group of Jews in Haggai's day weren't just making a building from sticks and stones. No way!!! They were taking their place in a great parade God designed to be witnessed by the entire world. First God paraded Himself in the Tabernacle, then in the Temple. Then, every time Jesus strode into the Temple to teach, the glory of God filled that building. This time, God was not housed in a building of brick and stone, but in a body of flesh and bone. God had designed this progression to be amplified like a parade where His outfits get better and better.

That's why, from God's perspective in v.9, "the latter glory of this house will be greater than the former." Solomon's original Temple never had the God incarnate in Jesus Christ step into it. But the rebuilt Temple was the stage onto which Jesus Christ would step.

Finally, the Temple would again be a place of peace. It was where humanity could meet God in peace on the basis of a sacrifice, and those sacrifices were starting again. That was its purpose. So Haggai says in v.9, "and in this place I will give peace." And so the peace sacrifices started, but it was only another foreshadowing of a greater peace sacrifice. In Luke 2, when Jesus was just a baby, his proud parents Mary and Joseph brought him to the Temple to dedicate him to God, an old man named Simeon cried out as he saw the baby Jesus and held him, "Now Lord, Thou dost let Thy bondservant depart in peace...for my eyes have seen Thy salvation...a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel." (Lk.2:29-30) From that point on, no Temple sacrifices were necessary, because Jesus had come to be the ultimate sacrifice for salvation. Therefore, God gave peace "in this place."

Then at the Cross, Jesus completely surpassed the role of the Temple. God tore the thick curtain that separated God's presence in the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple, thereby saying that everyone can come to God through Jesus. Now, people didn't have to worship God in Jerusalem. The Temple was no longer necessary, as Stephen argued in Acts 7.

What's more, Jesus went even beyond what the Temple did and established peace for ALL people, not just the Jews. The Israelites were building a wall in their Temple to keep the Gentiles separate from the Jews, but Paul says that Jesus metaphorically abolished that dividing wall and made peace between all humanity because all humanity can come to God equally. There is a great poem that illustrates this truth, Ephesians 2:11-22.

1. Therefore remember then that you the Gentiles in the flesh the ones called uncircumcised
2. by those called circumcised which is made in the flesh by hands
3. that you were once separated from Christ, alienated from the citizenship of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise
4. having no hope and without God in the world
5. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.
6. For he is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility in his body
7. abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances that of the two he might create in himself one new man
- 6'. so making peace, reconciling the two in one body to God through the cross bringing the hostility to and end in it.
- 5'. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near
- 4'. for through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father.
- 3'. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God
- 2'. built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone in whom the whole structure is joined together) and growing into a holy temple in the Lord
- 1'. into which you are also built for a dwelling place of God in the spirit.

So in his birth and death and indwelling presence in us, Jesus brings peace. We become living representatives of his peace. Let me tell you a story of how a friend of mine has done this. Her name is Pam Nordstrom. A few weeks ago, Pam invited my roommates and I over to her new house. She recently bought a house right in the heart of East Palo Alto that she has opened up to teenage moms of East Palo Alto. We had given her some tables so she could furnish the place. To thank us, she wanted to cook us some delicious pancakes with blackberries and other fruit from her own backyard. So who am I to say no to good free food? Pam opened up four large bedrooms in this house to teen moms so these young women can have a quiet place to raise their babies, a place of peace, not their boyfriends' apartments. Pam lives there and teaches a parenting class and a Bible study to these women along with a friend of hers. And that's how God meets those young women. God lives in a Temple named Pam. God meets human beings in her to make peace with them. And Pam is building up the corporate Temple of God, and that's what gets her excited. It's not that Pam didn't have other possibilities open to her. She graduated from Stanford in 1992. But she's worked for Bayshore Christian Ministries doing tutoring and Bible classes ever since. She's not building her own house. She's building God's house.

So now we take OUR place in God's parade. How does the book of Haggai pertain to us? We are also building a Temple. But ours is made up of human beings, not stones. We have an even greater task. That's why our Temple will last forever. Yes, their Temple was significant as a foreshadowing and a stage, but roughly seventy years after Jesus Christ first appeared in the Temple as a baby, it was destroyed by Titus Vespasian the Roman. Our Temple on the other hand, CANNOT BE DESTROYED. Their work was only a foreshadowing of our work. Theirs was temporary, but ours is everlasting.

That means that this is the only place to find significance. Significance is something we've searched for since childhood. It's evidenced by how we try to do something that will have everlasting meaning. Either we've tried to be significant in the eyes of that special someone, or in the eyes of the crowd wanting to see us achieve something.

Personally, I've always wanted both! That's called building a temple to myself, and trying to get people to worship me. But is that everlasting?

So, let's be very specific. Maybe you're feeling insignificant. Don't look to your Silicon Valley job as a way of trying to find meaning in life. Don't try to make lots of money to feel important. Don't try to earn titles and grow your career. It won't work, and ultimately, your work won't last. Join God in His work! His work will last, and if you join in His work, then what you do in Christ will last.

Or maybe you're feeling alone, and as a result, you spend too much time at work. In that case, I would encourage you to yield more of your life to God and let him fill you. Don't indulge yourself in diversions. God wants you to understand your identity as His dwelling place. Maybe you're empty emotionally and spiritually, and you need to stop building your house and your nest, so that God can build His home in you and bless you. Then, once you understand your identity, you'll be able to let God build His Temple corporately through you.

How can Canaan be a place of peace, a living Temple of God? By being a house of God's compassion in an ocean of busyness. By being an house of God's truth in an ocean of lies. By not building your house, but by building God's house. This is not about having nice buildings. It's about building people's lives.

### **The Third Sermon: God's Promise of Blessing: 2:10 – 19**

Maybe some of you are already putting God's house before your own, and it makes you worried. Maybe you're wondering, "What is going to come of this? Is ministry really worth it?" Yes, it is. That's the encouragement of Haggai's third sermon.

About two months later, God encourages the Israelites again. Basically God says, "Previously, I was holding back the rain and the harvest," but in v.18-19, He says, "Do 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: Is 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."

That is similar to Jesus promising that God will provide for our basic needs. In Matthew 6 he said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these other things will be added unto you." But I think the primary blessing that comes to us is not physical fruit, but spiritual fruit. If you have been seeking God and seeking to build His house, you will have the sweetness of a vine heavy with grapes (love and joy), the nourishment of the fig tree (peacefulness and patience), the fragrance of the pomegranate (kindness and goodness), and the beauty of the olive tree (faithfulness). For us, this garden is the blessing of being rich and full in the heart, of having much to give emotionally and relationally because Jesus Christ within makes us rich. That's important to me because one of my greatest fears in my life surfaced when I was 20 years old, after I had just broken up with a girl. It was the fear of having nothing to give, and being empty inside. That is not how God wants you to be. He will make your life a garden if you seek Him.

(One of the greatest joys in my life has been discipling a certain young man and watching him grow up. I met him his freshman year at Stanford, and I've met with him every week for two and a half years. This particular young man was challenging to me because he was so intense and had a lot of questions. He asked questions about his identity: Did he need one? We studied Romans 6. He asked about the Holy Spirit: Did he need the Spirit? We studied the Sermon on the Mount. The summer after his freshman year, he didn't get housing, so he lived with me in East Palo Alto. He learned to interact with young, crazy kids, and then I taught him how to cook. That summer was great; I got lasagna, often. We talked about how to handle certain friendships, how to handle sexuality, how to not let schoolwork take up all of his time. Some time after that, I helped him give his first sermons, challenge a professor, and write poetry. Last year when he proposed to his fiancée, I was one of the first people he told. "Mako, she said yes!!" And then I watched him grow in other areas. God led him and his fiancée to lead a Bible study for new Christians in their dorm. Recently, he asked about evolution and carbon 14 dating, and that pushed through the limits of my knowledge! But that led us both to times of fruitful thinking and talking. God blessed both of us enormously in those times because He grew me intellectually, spiritually, and as a friend. In fact, just a few weeks ago, on Friday, August 28, the two of them took me out to dinner and he said, "You've played such a large part in my spiritual growth, I would like you to officiate our wedding next year." I said, "But I'm not even ordained!!!"

### **The Fourth Sermon: The Promise of Messiah: 2:20 – 23**

On the same day, God has a special message for the governor, the faithful and longsuffering Zerubbabel. Basically, God promises Zerubbabel that the Messiah will come through his line. Back in the days of Jeremiah, God said he would cast off the royal line like a signet ring from His finger. Now in Haggai 2:23, he restores that signet ring to His finger. "On that day, I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, my servant, and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you."

How to conclude, then? In a world full of investment banking and cutting edge technology, real significance is still only found in Jesus Christ. What is more important than furthering your own private empire or the empire of your employer is furthering the kingdom of God. Zerubbabel and the remnant of Israel were impoverished for 18 years before they woke up and smelled the coffee, or lack thereof. So why is the church in America so spiritually impoverished? Could it be that we also pour more into our own work and our own house than into God's work and God's house? The message of Haggai is one of the most needed messages to our generation: Consider your ways; your priorities are all mixed up. But thank God that Haggai's message is also long on encouragement and reassurance. God is inviting us to share in His work, to be partners with Him, to be totally blessed out of our socks by Him, to have Him live through us by His Spirit, because His work is everlasting and significant.