

September 7, 2025

Return: Consider Your Ways

Haggai 1:1-15

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction...

The Book of Haggai, the second shortest in the Old Testament, and it was written to people like us, who would say, if we were asked, that God must be put first in our lives. But they had drifted away from this truth. They lived with misplaced priorities. And Haggai was sent to help God's people get their priorities back in line with what they knew they should be.

While Haggai is one of the smaller prophetic books in the Bible, it is crucially important in the overall redemptive story of the Bible. We know that even though the Bible contains 66 different books, it tells one story, God's one redemption story.

For centuries, the prophets had been accusing Israel of breaking their covenant with God through idolatry and injustice. They warned that God would send the great empire of Babylon to destroy Jerusalem, that the temple would also be torn down and burned, and the people would be slaughtered and those that remained would be taken off into exile.

And this is exactly what happened in the year 586 B.C. We can read about these events in the book of 2 Kings. Sadly, these things did occur and God poured out his justice on his own people because of their sin.

But that wasn't the end of the story. The prophets, namely Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, had the promise and a deep conviction that God would bring back a transformed remnant of Israel to live in a new Jerusalem, where God's Presence would live in their midst.

So, when we come to the book of Haggai, the date is 520 B.C., nearly 70 years after the people were originally taken off into exile. Unlike some of the other prophets we've covered, we actually get a lot of details about Haggai the author and we even get a specific date which we'll see in our passage today.

During this time, Babylon's empire had fallen, and the world was now ruled by the Persians, under King Darius, who allowed the return of any exiled Israelites who wanted to go back to Jerusalem. Under the leadership of a high priest named Joshua, or Jeshua depending on your translation, and Zerubbabel, a governor set up by King Darius that just happened to be an heir from the line of King David, a group of exiles returned and began to rebuild the city and their lives. So you can imagine that the people's hopes are high and the future seems bright! But not from Haggai's point of view.

When the Jews returned from exile they faced the daunting task of rebuilding. The first group of people who returned made attempts to clear the rubble and lay the foundation for a second temple.

But, as the years passed, slowly but surely, Jerusalem came to life again. They rebuilt their homes. They re-opened stores and commerce was established. They once again planted crops in the fields that were once farmed by their ancestors and life began to feel normal again. Israel, however, got used to life without the Temple.

The foundations, once laid by the first group to return, were now overgrown with weeds. And they stood as a reminder of the Jews' failure to take care of God's house. About 15 years passed after they had returned, and then Haggai appeared on the scene with one prevailing message: It's time to finish rebuilding the Temple. In other words, it's time to get back to God's business.

It was a message of priority: Put first things first. The Temple was the center for worshiping God. It represented the heart and soul of the worship of God in the Old Testament. Although God is everywhere, the Temple was the place on earth where God dwelled in a special sense. For the Temple to lie in ruins was to neglect the worship of God. It was a testimony of misplaced priorities. It was an embarrassment to God and a blemish on his reputation.

And so, Haggai's message was blunt. He pulled no punches and wasted no words. I've heard Pastor Bruce use the phrase about when a pastor goes from preaching to meddling. Well, today it's meddling. I trust that any meddling done today would be from the Holy Spirit. He has been meddling with me all week and now it's your turn. If you are able, please stand with me as I read the first 15 verses of Haggai ch. 1 and let us hear this same message today. [Read Passage]

First, Haggai confronted the people to stop making excuses for why the Temple was lying in ruins. [Read vs. 2]

The people intended to build God's house, but just hadn't got around to it yet. I'm sure if you were to ask them about it, they would have probably said, "I'm all for building the Temple. It's a great cause. But God wants us to take care of our own families first. Times are hard. Jobs are scarce. We need to pray about it some more. We will eventually build it, but not now," and they made excuses.

Benjamin Franklin wrote, "I never knew a man who was good at making excuses who was good at anything else."

It is always easy to make excuses when you don't want to obey God. We can always find rational justification for not doing what God wants us to do: The time is not right. I've got other responsibilities. When things settle down, then I can do something. The first step to putting first things first is to admit our responsibility.

And closely aligned with excuse making is a selfish mindset that permeates everything. Haggai challenged the people to stop being selfish. [Read vs. 3-4]

Paneled houses can mean "covered" or "roofed," but the point was that it represented the finishing touches. Their homes were not "in process." No weeds were growing around their unfinished foundations. Their homes were complete while the Temple remained nonexistent.

Please understand: Nothing is wrong with taking care of things at home. This statement is not an attack on riches or big houses. What we're talking about here is a mindset. What's wrong is putting our own selfish interests first while ignoring the things of God. What's wrong is to spend the best of our time and our talents on selfish pursuits while the things of God are left undone. It is an indictment of misplaced priorities.

It is easy to drift away from God's agenda to our own. It is easy to pursue selfish desires while ignoring God's. Why? Because it is the default mode of our hearts. If we give no thought to how we are living, we will naturally live for ourselves. Our hearts are always

bent toward selfishness. This is what happened to the people which Haggai is addressing here. They were looking out for themselves and their own interests first before thinking of God and his interests.

It's just like what William Cowper, the hymn writer and pastor, wrote in the familiar hymn 'Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing,' "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love." That is what happens when we don't persistently and consistently seek God first in our lives.

III. Don't miss God's blessings

Now, as a natural consequence of their excuse-making and selfish living, the people in Haggai's day were missing out on God's blessing and were experienced hardship. He continues: [Read vs. 5-6]

They sowed plenty of seed, but there was a drought and the crops didn't yield as much as they had hoped. They had active lifestyles but were not experiencing satisfaction. They were working but they were not making any profit. No matter how hard they tried, they seemed to be spinning their wheels. No matter how much money they made, they could not keep it. Do you know how that feels? The constant striving and never getting ahead. The world is full of people who are constantly pursuing, sometimes they don't even know what it is, and they are never satisfied. Because only a relationship with God and a life built on his firm foundation will bring any real satisfaction.

Because of their selfishness the people missed God's blessings. Haggai points out a sobering reminder here. What happens in your heart affects every other part of your life. Because the people had pushed God out of the center, they suffered in every area.

And what they did not see was that God was behind it all as we see in vs. 8-11. They hadn't stopped to consider that God was trying to tell them something. Haggai was trying to get their attention, "Hey! It's God who controls the rain and the harvest. He is withholding his blessing because your priorities are not right. Put his house first and he will bless you."

You know, Jesus said the same thing in his sermon on the mount, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33) Blessings come through obedience. If we want to experience God's blessings we will put him first.

With this strong indictment, the people realized they had caused their own misfortunes and the people were ready to evaluate their situation. Twice Haggai instructed the people, "Consider your ways" in vs. 5 & 7. The word consider means "to give careful thought to." It was time for the people to do some serious self-examination before the Lord. Haggai wanted the people to stop long enough in their busy schedules to evaluate their life in light of God's Word. He wanted them to measure the consequences of their actions.

Evaluation is a good thing. That is why teachers give tests and employers hold job reviews. Each day we need to evaluate how we spend our time and our money and how we use our talents. We should examine who we choose as friends, what we set as goals, and where we are going. If God is not first, guess who has removed him from his rightful place?

The failure to make constant corrections each day to realign ourselves is like a pilot who does not make slight course adjustments in flight. The plane will end up hundreds of miles off course later. The same will happen to us if we don't have our priorities straight. We will veer off course.

When we stop making excuses, stop being selfish, when we seek God's blessings, and take time to evaluate, we will see God work in powerful ways in our lives. This is what happens when first things are first, when God is first in our hearts. How will we know that we have put first things first? How will we know that God is first place? Well the text gives us three indications.

First, we are actively serving him. [Read vs. 8]

In all of life there is a time to talk and a time to act, a time to consider and a time to do. Those who put first things first are up and doing the right things: spending time with God daily, serving people, honoring him with their time, talents, and financial resources. For the Jews living in Jerusalem, it meant cutting down trees to build God's house. There are plenty of opportunities to serve God in this church. And it's perfect timing too because we have an annual meeting coming up and its time to find volunteers for the various committees that help make this church function. We have vacancies all over the place so find one that fits your gifts and talents and get involved. The greeter list still has spaces available. Whatever it is, get involved.

Secondly, God is glorified. Why should the Temple be built? That God may be glorified. When God is not first, we are indifferent to his glory and his reputation being spread. But when God is first, revealing his glory and sharing his gospel to the world is first on our minds. In fact, everything we think, say, and do is to honor God and bring credit to him. Whatever your occupation, the chief business of every Christian is to bring glory to God.

Thirdly, God's blessing is evident in obedience. When the people obeyed, God sent word: "And the people feared the LORD...I am with you" (1:12-13). When God is first, he blesses us. And the sure sign of his blessing was his manifested presence. If God seems distant in your life, perhaps your priorities have gotten mixed up. When you put God first, you experience a new awareness of his presence. That is true blessing.

The text tells us that they feared God then they obeyed God and got to work. May we do the same. Let's pray and prepare our hearts for the table of the Lord.