

Time To Rebuild

God's message through Haggai is about rebuilding what has fallen into ruin. I believe we can all relate to the need for that. It is very timely for us all. We can handle this ancient story and interpret it appropriately and see within it, truths that are very helpful for us right now. Ultimately underlying the historical context of Haggai, there is a message about embracing God's perspective when we are in danger of losing it. Haggai calls us to consider our ways and, as we do, assures us that the Lord is with us as we give ourselves to him. He has given us the revelation we need to follow his guidance. He's promised to be with us and to bless us as we embrace his priorities. In **Matthew 6:33**, Jesus said, *Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* That's not the false prosperity gospel. That's the promise of Jesus.

There is a particular fittingness of this book for us because for the Israelites to whom Haggai first prophesied, the pressing need was to rebuild the house of the LORD. For them, it was the physical temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonian armies. What might we need to rebuild? Sometimes there are just seasons in life where there are personal things we need to rebuild. Things fall apart, and something things get torn apart. Sometimes there is something bigger than my personal life that needs to be rebuilt. Think of these last few years. We've gone through political strife, as well as all of the uncertainty and the various concerns and divisions around the pandemic. If you look at the statistics, some churches have gone under. Pastors have quit from the division and stress of it all. Scandals have undermined the credibility of the church. Many members or regular attenders at churches have gotten out of the habit of weekly worship and participation and have fallen away. I read that attendance, financial support, and ministry participation overall is down by 40% in most churches. The health and strength of the church of Jesus Christ needs to be rebuilt. The world is getting increasingly hostile. We need strong churches to raise up a new generation of young people to face future challenges with strength and grace. Is there something we need

to build?

The circumstances today are different than those when this book was written. We will need to weigh the significance of that. But what was true then and is true now is this.

I. GOD WANTS US TO GIVE HIS HOUSE ITS PROPER PLACE OF PRIORITY IN OUR LIVES.

Haggai 1:2-4 says, *“Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.”* ³ Then the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, ⁴ *“Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? There is more than one legitimate application of this passage to our lives today. It speaks to misplaced priorities, sins of omission, neglected duties, and procrastination. But all those themes orbit undeniably around the central theme of “the house of the LORD.”*

What will help us apply much of Haggai is to realize...

A. The church is for us today what the temple was for believers in the days of Haggai.

When we speak of the church, we are not talking about a physical building but a gathered community established by faith in Jesus.

1 Peter 2:4-6 talks about Jesus and says, *As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious,* ⁵ *you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* ⁶ *For it stands in Scripture:*

*“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”*

The cornerstone is the first stone laid in a building. The shape, strength, and beauty of the whole structure depend on the cornerstone being the right one and everything being correctly secured and lined up with it. When you come to Christ and trust in him, you become what

Scripture calls a living stone. You are built together with all who believe into a spiritual house, a temple made not of physical stones but of people. You are also a holy priesthood. Your worship becomes a spiritual sacrifice offered to God. The church is for us today what the temple, the house of the LORD, was for people in Haggai's day.

Ephesians 2:18-22 says, *For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.* The cornerstone is Jesus. The remaining foundation is the apostles and prophets. They gave us the Scriptures. All of Scripture points to Christ, and he is the one who holds us all together and shapes us as his church.

B. The essence of the church as the temple is that it is a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

In one sense, God is present everywhere. But when God says His Spirit dwells in us, He is talking about being graciously present to bless us. God says, *"I will personally manifest my presence in your midst. I will be there speaking to you, guiding you, leading you, and strengthening you. I will show you your sins, and I will assure you of my love. I will be present in your midst to minister to your needs"*.

When we confess our faith using the Apostles' Creed, we say at one point, "I believe in the holy Catholic Church." Catholic is not Roman Catholic but simply the historic Latin word for *universal*. But what do we mean when we say I believe in the church? If I say I don't believe in God, that usually means I don't believe God exists. But to say I don't believe in the church doesn't mean I don't believe it exists. It has to mean, I don't believe the church is what the Bible says it is. So reverse that. To believe in the church means *not* just that you believe that it exists, but you believe it is what God says it is and should be given the place God says it should. Paul asks an important question of us in **1**

Corinthians 3:16. He says, *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?* The "you" in the verse is plural. He's saying see with eyes of faith this truth: the church is the holy temple in which God is present. In the Bible, God is constantly asking us to see, by faith, a different reality than that which is perceived by the naked eye. This church, this community of believers, is a holy place because when we gather here, God is present with us and in us; the children we smile at, the old friends that greet us in the lobby, and the new friends we meet every Sunday, they are *living stones,... being built into a spiritual house* for God. **Hebrews 13** says our songs of praise are the sacrifices we offer in the LORD'S house. In the sermon, we hear his word. In communion, we rest in his presence and give thanks. In our Christ-centered relationships, **Ephesians 4** says we build the church up in love.

So this is where we begin in Haggai. God wants us to give his house its proper place of priority in our lives. With that in mind...

II. GOD CALLS US TO BUILD HIS HOUSE FOR HIS PLEASURE AND GLORY.

Verses 7-8. *"Thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. ⁸ Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the LORD.* We do not have to go up to the hills and bring wood today, so how might we apply this? What do we do to build up the church? It is a more spiritual than a physical question for us. Certainly, the spiritual principle revealed here would serve as a call for us all to work to be the church as God desires. When we receive members, we ask them to commit to support the church in her worship and work. A few years ago, we asked our members what that meant to them. *How does a member "support this church in its worship and work, to the best of your ability?"* For the most part, everybody that replied mentioned the same things; faithful attendance, consistent giving, supporting each other, welcoming new members, praying for members and pastors, participating in the ministries of the church, and bearing witness to Jesus. Years ago, we asked this of our members and received six pages of answers like that, but of course, the important thing is how do you answer that question?

How do you support the church if you come here, this church, in her worship and work to help build the spiritual house of the LORD?

Haggai doesn't just tell us to build the house of the LORD. He tells us three things applicable to all of us at a time like this. First...

A. We have to deal firmly with apathy.

Apathy is a common issue for God's people in Scripture and life. That's part of the backstory for Haggai. The story of Haggai takes place a little over 500 years before the coming of Christ. The Hebrew people had gone through a time of spiritual confusion and rebellion. Just like today, with nations and individuals, God gives us time to repent, and too often, we take that as indifference on his part. But then the judgment comes. That's what happened to them. War came. The Babylonians conquered them. The temple had been destroyed. The people scattered and became refugees or prisoners. You can get more details through the link in the sermon notes if you download them. 1

It is good to remember there will come a day when there are no more opportunities to start over. We're not there yet. *They* were not there yet, then. God had sent prophets to tell them there would come a time when they could return and rebuild. In the days of Haggai, those prophecies were fulfilled. The Persians conquered the Babylonians. At the time of Haggai, Darius is the ruler of Persia. He has allowed God's people to return and rebuild the temple. They had started building the LORD's house, but they encountered difficulty. There was opposition. What happened to them is what happens to us. Sometimes we get a burst of passion, emotion, or momentum about God and wanting to know him and build the things he wants us to build into our lives and communities and churches, but we run into difficulty and fail to persevere. Like a slow leak in a tire, there is no explosive crisis, just a steady deflation until we're running on flat tires. What happens next is predictable. Our focus becomes our house, our life, our comfort, and our success. God remains part of our life but not the heart of our life. We don't make a decision. We just drift into a way of life that is mostly about us and our houses, not God and his. I've had several people tell me they fear this is where we're at with many Christians and churches

after the issues of the recent years. Like the people in Haggai's day, most don't say we're never going to put God and his house first, they echo the words of **verse 2**, *the time has not yet come*.

In many countries, there are ancient churches that lie in ruins, and everyone thinks that's normal. No one thinks they need to rebuild those churches. I sometimes wonder if people look at the state of the church spiritually today and think this is now the new normal let's just accept it.

Isn't it the case that a decisive commitment to start is always the first step in putting anything that has, at any level, fallen apart together again? This is so true, personally. When things have been shaken or have just fallen apart, you can be overwhelmed by the rubble and unsure of where to begin or even if you have the energy to try. It helps to remember that in a fallen and broken world, things falling apart and breaking down is to be expected. And some of the stories we love the most are stories about a comeback. Hardship makes heroes. Our struggles are what strengthen us. The greatest of all comeback stories is the story of Jesus, whose brutal death on the cross looks like a tragedy but pays for our sins, secures our salvation, and leads to resurrection. His story isn't over! Jesus said he will build his church and the gates of *hell* will not prevail against it. He is the one who calls us to faith and devotion. He says he will build his church, but he intends to do it through us, his body, his hands. That, like the promise of God's presence in Haggai gives us great hope and confidence.

Whether it is rebuilding your broken world personally or rebuilding the house of the LORD and his church. The first step in rebuilding is making the decision and finding the strength to begin. By the time we get to **verse 7** and the phrase "*thus says the LORD of Hosts,*" we've been told seven times and in several ways that this is the Word of the LORD. God wants us to hear the authoritative imperative and know we have his support in the work we do for him.

And then, having dealt firmly with apathy...

B. We have to quit making excuses.

Go back to **verse 2**, "... *These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.*" This is interesting for a couple of reasons. For one thing, sometimes we may think God is distant and unconcerned, but he isn't ever. This happens a lot in the Bible. People get this far away feeling with God, and then he speaks – and when the word of the LORD comes, it's suddenly clear that he knows what you have been saying. He has intimate knowledge of everything going on with you. Haggai doesn't tell us all of the reasons the people were saying "not yet." But when we say the time has not yet come, there are always reasons we think that. There are always excuses for our disbelief and disobedience. What are yours?

It's a familiar story. We all make excuses. Excuses are useless when God calls us to do something. God asked Adam if he had eaten of the tree God told him not to eat from, and Adam said, "The woman! The woman you gave to be with me, she gave it to me." God said to the woman, "What have you done?" She said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." We blame others, and if there isn't someone, we blame something. We live to some extent in a victimhood culture today. There are legitimate concerns about understanding how trauma and circumstances contribute to the dysfunction in our lives, but the essence of victimhood is to shift blame, make excuses, and deny responsibility. We need safe spaces and trigger warnings. It's someone else's fault when I act badly and someone else's responsibility to fix things. Well, the word of the LORD cuts through all that. Behind the words of the people, *the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD*, whatever their reasons or excuses, there was no getting away from the fact that the LORD was calling them to care for and to rebuild his house. It's the same with us.

We have to deal firmly with apathy and quit making excuses and...

C. We have to give ourselves to God's priorities.

This is the point that comes through so clearly in **verse 4**. "*Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies in ruins?*" Notice the phrase "*You yourselves.*" That is a good translation of the Hebrew wording, and it is emphatic and pointed. It doubles down on the personal pronoun to call attention to the one-

sided nature of their interests. Later in Haggai, he will speak of the temple, but here he keeps using the phrase “*the house of the LORD.*” That *is* a common name for the temple, but its repeated use highlights the contrast between our priorities and God’s, our house and his.

There is nothing wrong with home ownership or with wanting your home to be comfortable and tastefully decorated. But there is a problem when our own interests are the sole priority in our lives, and we neglect things that are holy and that matter to God because we are too focused on and busy with ourselves. Paul writes about this in the New Testament. In **Philippians 2:21**, he said, *For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.* In **Matthew 6:33**, Jesus was correcting this tendency when he said, *Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.* Believe that. God’s work does not lack God’s provision and help.

Through Haggai, God calls us to make his pleasure and glory our ultimate priority. Look at **verse 8** again. The LORD says, “*Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the LORD.*” So notice, the motive is not just to do this so that life will go better, that is in the background, but the motive given ultimately is to please and glorify the LORD. It pleases him because it is what he asks of us. To build the temple or to build the church, the LORD's house today pleases him. And it also glorifies him. It reflects who he is, and it shows that we value him.

Conclusion

Remember, Peter said Jesus is the cornerstone, chosen and precious in the sight of God. Part of the power of the cornerstone imagery is that when you are connected to Christ, that connection to him changes everything. In him, you also are chosen and precious to God. He died to pay for our sins and rose again as our Savior. Whoever believes and trusts in him is saved by grace, forgiven, and given eternal life. Trust in him. And because you do give his house, his temple, his church the place it deserves in your life and build it up for his pleasure and glory. When we build the church, the spiritual fellowship of people on the journey of discipleship and mission when is our purpose. He is

glorified. To see God's people coming together to work and worship together, to acknowledge and display his value in sacrifices of praise, to reverence him is pleasing and glorifying to him.

Amen.

A Prayer Expressing Faith in Christ

Almighty God, Your Holy Spirit awakens in me a conviction of my sin and need that drives me to Jesus as Lord and Savior. Open my eyes to see Christ as the Savior and only cornerstone for a church of redeemed sinners. He died for my sins and rose again as my Savior and Lord. I turn to and trust in him alone for my redemption. His saving grace brings peace to those who were far from you and from each other. In him, we are made fellow citizens of your kingdom and fellow members of your household. May we live that reality in faith. Amen.

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Holy Father, Help me to see the church as you see the church: a holy community of grace and faith. Help me to live in a way that expresses the oneness into which you have called us as your redeemed people, not as strangers or aliens but as fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. This is all by grace so let us live in grace and extend grace to each other. Make us a gathered people who come together faithfully to worship and serve you in Jesus' name. Amen.

1 <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/introduction-to-haggai/>