

Haggai 1:1-6 "Consider Your Ways" Notes

The people had taken a brave and courageous trip from Babylon to Jerusalem just 16 years prior, but due to conflict and legal action, they had been forced to stop the work of rebuilding the temple. God wanted the people to keep working, so He used Haggai to call them out and show them that He was still trying to get their attention and hadn't given up on them. Is God trying to get your attention too?

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Haggai

Minor prophet

Post-exilic (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)

Began in 520 BC and ended 3 months later

Uses "LORD of Hosts" 14x in 12 verses

Historical Overview - Approximately 50,000 Israelites came to Jerusalem out of Babylon (under Cyrus, Ezra 1-3) in 538 BC. By 536 BC, Governor Zerubbabel and High Priest Joshua began laying the foundation of the temple but due to opposition from the Samaritans and a later command from the king of Persia (Ezra 4), work on the temple ceased until 520 BC with the rebukes and commands of Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5). The temple was completed and dedicated in 516 BC (Ezra 6). Ezra himself, and Nehemiah, didn't come until much later in the mid-5th century (457 BC, Ezra 7, and 444 BC, Nehemiah 1-2) when they would rebuild the wall of Jerusalem in just 52 days (Nehemiah 3-6).

538 B.C. - Decree of Cyrus to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1)

536 B.C. - Completion of the altar and foundation of the temple (Ezra 3)

Work ceased because of opposition until reign of Darius (Ezra 4)

520 B.C. - Haggai begins ministry in 6th month, work on the temple resumes

Zechariah begins ministry in 8th month, spiritual revival ensues

516 B.C. - Temple is completed (Ezra 5-6)

457 B.C. - Ezra and caravan arrive in Jerusalem (Ezra 7)

444 B.C. - Nehemiah arrives (Nehemiah 1-2) and the wall is completed (Nehemiah 3-6)

Division of Haggai

1:1-15 - First Message (2nd Year, 6th Month)

1:1-11 - Rebuke and Exhortation (1st Day)

1:12-15 - Response (24th Day)

2:1-9 - Second Message (2nd Year, 7th Month, 21st Day)

2:1-9 - Encouragement to All

2:10-19 - Third Message (2nd Year, 9th Month, 24th Day)

2:10-14 - A Lesson on Defilement

2:15-19 - Promised Blessing

2:20-23 - Fourth Message (2nd Year, 9th Month, 24th Day)

2:20-23 - Encouragement to Zerubbabel

Primary Message - "Consider Your Ways"

Recognize

Repent

Return

Imagine this - after 70 years in captivity, your people were given the green light to return to your homeland with blessings from the king. You, and about 50,000 people, hit the road and traveled all the way back to this deserted place. Everything was still in ruins, overgrown. You brought your tents - it was a long journey, about four months' time to travel about 900 miles. You pitched your tents and just took it all in. What an overwhelming sight! The whole city was rubble. As you went to bed that first night in Jerusalem, you wondered what kind of creatures or even raiders could come around and get into your food.

The next morning, you and the people assembled in what used to be the city square. Governor Zerubbabel and High Priest Joshua were there to address everyone. They had a big display as Joshua and the other priests began by building the altar of burnt offerings and started offering the sacrifices of burnt offerings to the Lord. They reinstated the daily offerings and worship to the Lord. What a joyful occasion! You observed as Zerubbabel gave the money that King Cyrus had sent him with to the carpenters and the stone masons, along with food, drink, and oil, and sent them to Tyre and Sidon to get cedars from Lebanon.

While you all waited for the building supplies, you worked on clearing some of the rubble and even set up some walls around your tent so you felt safer.

About two years had passed since you returned from Babylon and there was a rumor spreading around the camp that the builders had nearly finished the foundation of the temple. They had gotten the rubble cleared and had begun laying the stones again! You and your neighbors all gathered to see what was happening. You saw the priests arrayed in linen garments with trumpets as they raised them to their mouths. You saw more priests grabbing the cymbals and with one loud blast of the trumpets and clash of the cymbals, the celebration had begun! The priests all sang in unison "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel!" The crowd cheered loud enough to shake the earth! Then you remembered the words of Jeremiah of Anathoth from just seventy years prior:

Jeremiah 33:10-11 - "Thus says the LORD: 'Again there shall be heard in this place--of which you say, "It is desolate, without man and without beast"--in the cities of Judah, in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without beast, 'the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who will say: "Praise the LORD of hosts, For the LORD is good, For His mercy endures forever"--and of those who will bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. For I will cause the captives of the land to return as at the first,' says the LORD."

But in one ear you heard the elders weeping. It was hard to tell the difference with all the noise but there were tears in their eyes. You could barely read their lips, something about Solomon. Oh, they were recalling the glory of Solomon's temple. They were right. This temple will never compare to Solomon's.

All the noise drew the attention of the neighboring peoples and a couple days later, there was a group of Samaritans coming through town. They came to the city square and were met by Governor Zerubbabel and High Priest Joshua and the rest of the elders. They offered to help build the temple. "How strange," you thought, "are they even allowed to, since they are not consecrated?" The leaders answered shortly with, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the Lord God of Israel, as King Cyrus commanded us." With some crude language and foul gestures, the Samaritans began to leave, muttering threats and saying that you'll never be able to finish the temple.

After that day, it seemed like there never failed to be someone coming in to hinder you from working on the temple. Someone coming in threatening to attack you or even a group of leaders coming to accuse you of rebellion against the king. It didn't go on for too long before you heard rumors that King Artaxerxes had sent a letter commanding that you stop working. As the word spread, the people started asking Governor Zerubbabel

and High Priest Joshua if this was true. They admitted that yes, it was true, but that we should keep working. The next day, the nations of the land came and threatened that if you didn't stop working, you would all be killed. So you stopped. What else could you do?

For the first few months after that, you and your neighbors kept wondering when you could get back to work on the temple. It was so exciting to see it going up, but since you couldn't work on it, you started to feel directionless, like a person without a vision or a goal. As the days went by you started to pick up some more jobs around your tent. Those walls were coming along well. Before you knew it, you had a roof over your heads so you could take the tent down. You and your neighbor decided to split the work and got a large garden going! For some reason though, you just couldn't quite get a solid harvest. You'd plant a whole bag of seed and only end up with a couple baskets of vegetables and half as much seed as you started with.

With the wheat you grew, your wife made a couple loaves of bread, but it never seemed like enough to fill you. The wine and water just never quite quenched your thirst. You were able to take your old tent and turn it into new clothes for everyone, but they never were thick enough to keep the wind out and you always felt chilled. As the years went by, everyone went back to work and worked hard, but the money you earned felt like it disappeared just as quickly as payday could come. You watched as the city began to look beautiful! Houses were being completed, some people even started putting cedar panels on their houses! "Wonder where they got that?" you asked yourself.

Every now and then, as you walked past the foundation of the temple, you'd wonder if it would ever get finished. You even asked some of the elders one day and they told you, "The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." You took them at their word. They were the leaders after all. Before you knew it, 16 years had gone by. Life was in full swing, even though it felt like you could never quite catch up, let alone get ahead. The temple still laid bare, just a foundation and an altar.

That's when you first heard the words from Haggai. You heard he was prophesying in the city square, so you and your neighbors went to listen:

"Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: 'This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built." "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!"

"Wow!" You think, "He's right. They do say that!" He continues:

"You have sown much, and bring in little;
You eat, but do not have enough;
You drink, but you are not filled with drink;
You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm;
And he who earns wages,
Earns wages to put into a bag with holes."

Okay, back to the present. What a scathing rebuke from the Lord, He hits it on the nose. When we put ourselves in their shoes though, we can understand why they stopped, but that doesn't make it right. God had called them to an important work and they gave up too soon, so he calls to them and says, "Consider your ways!"

Being a Christian is not intended to be an easy thing. It is no small decision. Unfortunately there are many out there who will preach that all God wants for you is to be happy, healthy, and wealthy. This just isn't true. God

promises to provide all our needs and to never forsake us. Let's take a look at Jesus' words in **Matthew 6:25-34**.

If you don't have verse 33 highlighted or underlined, you should definitely consider it.

Matthew 6:33 - "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Jesus tells us here - don't worry about life. Whether it be food, drink, or clothing. God knows you need those things, so He promises to provide them. Jesus isn't saying to neglect those things, that would be very different, He is saying not to worry about them. Instead, what should we be occupied with? The kingdom of God! This is a broad phrase and can include things like evangelism, service, giving, fellowship, worship, and more.

I'm not asking for a show of hands, but how many of us have fallen into this trap - the trap of being so consumed with day-to-day life that we forget to pray or to read our Bibles? I know I have. It is hard to fight - after all it is human nature to worry. But Jesus says to seek Him first. To seek His kingdom and ALL THESE THINGS shall be taken care of.

Let's be careful not to twist these words though - Jesus promises needs, not an abundance of earthly things. That's where the prosperity teachings go off the rails. Haggai shows a great example of how God was correcting His people. They started off well, but due to legitimate concerns, they quit the work. For 16 years then, God kept trying to get their attention. He wasn't sending complete famine among them or plague or pestilence. He wasn't sending nations after them to conquer and enslave - that was discipline for disobedience and rejection. This is a much softer correction. Look at Haggai 1:6 again -

-You have sown much, and bring in little;

-You eat, but do not have enough;

-You drink, but you are not filled with drink;

-You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm;

-And he who earns wages,

Earns wages to put into a bag with holes."

Right here God calls out to them and wonders why they haven't noticed Him. "You plant a ton of seed, but you always have a minimal harvest. Haven't you wondered why that is?"

You have sown much, and bring in little;

You eat, but do not have enough;

God continues and brings to mind their hunger. They haven't felt full in a long time. Even though they have enough food to survive, God is saying that He has caused them to be hungry still. For the Jew's specifically, part of their conditional covenant was that they would have temporal, physical blessings when they were in obedience. They should have expected that. But they had given up and compromised to just barely get by.

You have sown much, and bring in little;

You eat, but do not have enough;

You drink, but you are not filled with drink;

The same goes for drink. Their thirst was never quenched. Never enough water.

Matthew 5:6 - Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

You have sown much, and bring in little;

You eat, but do not have enough;
You drink, but you are not filled with drink;
You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm;

No matter how many clothes they wore, they just couldn't get warm. The winds would blow, the nights would chill, even the fires they built weren't enough to warm them to the core.

You have sown much, and bring in little;
You eat, but do not have enough;
You drink, but you are not filled with drink;
You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm;
And he who earns wages,
Earns wages to put into a bag with holes."

Lastly, God calls to mind the paycheck-to-paycheck lifestyle they had been living. Again - specifically for the Jews, part of their conditional promises were abundance and blessings. They should have recognized something was wrong when they just couldn't get ahead. Always fighting and having to work overtime just to make ends meet. As soon as they felt comfortable, their wagon would break and they'd have to pay the carpenter to come fix the wheel.

So God calls to them, through Haggai, and says, "Consider your ways! Look at these things and wonder!" God had called them to rebuild the temple. They stopped because they were forced to, but then they just gave up. God wanted them to keep going. So He spent 16 years trying to get their attention - oh how thick headed we can be!

They had even convinced themselves that the way they were living was okay. They told themselves, "It's not time to start on the temple, YET." Instead, what did they do?

They got to work on their own houses. They were beautifying the city. God sent them with a very specific task and even blessed them through King Cyrus to have all the materials to do the work. When the work ceased, they found other things to work on, and they were content to do so. Later, they will return to the work of rebuilding the temple, but they have to go get more wood. What happened to the cedars they got from Lebanon with Cyrus' money?? God responds to their excuse of "It's not time yet" with "Is it time for you to dwell in paneled houses?"

In other words, they had been putting so much work and materials into their houses while God's house was still in ruins. Where did they get the panels for their houses? We're not 100% sure, but it seems they used the cedars from Lebanon that were supposed to be for the temple!

Now, it can be easy for us to read through this and hear all that was going on from a purely outside perspective, that's why I started by putting us in their shoes. I want us to heed God's command to "consider our ways."

God has called us all to a specific work, there's no doubt about that. For all of us, part of that work is to make disciples. From there, God breaks down our callings on an individual level. Some of us are called to teach, some are called to worship, some are called to children's ministry, some are called to greet, some are called to lead a home fellowship or Bible study, some are called to do meal trains, some are called to serve in other capacities.

We're no strangers to "life" - when hard times come and we have to shift our priorities to deal with the biggest issue before addressing the rest. No one is faulting you for that. But how many of us have been, or even are presently, guilty of giving up on what God has called us because of opposition, trials, "life," or work? This text is a sobering wake up call for us. I want you to sincerely ask yourself, I know I had to face this myself, but ask yourself "Am I sowing much, but bringing in little? Am I eating, but just never having enough? Am I drinking, but never quenching that thirst? Am I putting too much effort into dressing well, and just never being satisfied or warmed? Am I working and working and working, but never getting caught up on bills?"

I'm not here to throw you under the bus or judge you in any way. We are all held to God's standard, and He is calling us all to come to Him and return to the work He has called us to. We face common enemies. We fight our flesh - which constantly is vying for attention, for satisfaction, and for ease. But God has called us to deny ourselves. We fight this world - which is telling us that we should have a bigger house, faster car, more money, fancier clothes. But God has called us to take up our cross and die to this world. We fight the devil - who constantly is looking for ways to trip us up or to distract us from seeking God first. But God has called us to follow Jesus.

So take it to heart, what God says through Haggai, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" Is it time for us to be seeking temporal blessings and material things while we neglect the raising of our children, the fellowship of our brothers and sisters in Christ, or even giving back to God just a tenth of what He has given us? Are our hearts in the right place? When we get to Malachi, much of this will be covered again because the Jews needed to hear it again, and most likely so will we.

But check out verse 9 in **Haggai 1:9** - "You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the LORD of hosts. "Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house."

I'm not saying that the reason we struggle to make ends meet or face any trial in life is because we are neglecting these things, but it is a possibility. There are numerous other reasons that God allows trials in our lives, this is one of them. Which is why each of us need to carefully ponder and meditate on these words of Haggai and take them to prayer. We need to "consider our ways". Maybe God has been trying to get your attention, will you listen?

Something amazing about Haggai's and Zechariah's ministries is the people's response. They listened! When God called them to return to the work of the temple, they listened and started working on it! When God called them to return to Him spiritually, they listened! That was a rare thing for the prophets. I pray that you would spend some time today, this week, sincerely coming before God and asking Him to show you what to do. You might be surprised just how willing He is to help you. He loves you and wants you near Him. He wants to bless you with joy, peace, and wisdom. He promises those things to us.

Psalm 139:23-24 - Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.