



Haggai – God Says to Build!

Minor Prophets #5 • August 10, 2025

Opening

I've shared this story before, but it just fits today.



My dad came home from the farm auction with a surprise. He had gone there hoping to purchase some camper jacks – the kind you might use with a pickup truck camper. Dad won exactly what he wanted. He had placed a bid on the camper jacks, and he won! But when he went to claim his items, he discovered that the bid was not just for the camper jacks – it was for the camper, too!

In the next few days, Dad brought the camper home and set it in our backyard, beside the swing set. A little work to the interior and a little bit of paint on the exterior, Dad said, and this would be a fantastic playhouse for me and my sister.

What a great thought! We could spend a summer night outside, “roughing it” in our remodeled luxury playhouse. It had a couple of beds, it had a small refrigerator, and it had cabinets to store all the amazing things we would bring in there.

We set to work that summer, and dad gave us the task of scraping the paint off the camper to prepare it for a fresh coat. He got to work on some of the interior, tearing out some of the carpet and working on the cabinets. It was a great start.

But you know what? To this day, I never spent the night in that camper. Our dream playhouse never materialized. Dad had other projects that jumped ahead of the playhouse. Being a farmer, a broken tractor was more important to fix than a toy for the kids. And then other projects came up. And others. And others.

The camper sat in our yard for years, a memorial to incomplete projects. It was a house in disrepair, a reminder of unfulfilled dreams.

But it did at least accomplish one thing...

It served as a great illustration to lead us to the Minor Prophet Haggai!



Recap

Welcome back to our sermon series on the Minor Prophets!

In our summer sermon series, we have been exploring **a selection of** these short, prophetic books... hearing not just *about* God, but *from* Him!

We've looked at Obadiah, Jonah, and Nahum so far. Each one has had relevant and challenging lessons for us.

Today's prophet, Haggai, will be no different!

The story of my dad's failed camper renovation is a perfect tie-in to the subject matter of Haggai: the unfinished restoration of God's house (the Temple) in the sixth century B.C.

But Haggai isn't just about blueprints and construction materials. The *spiritual* lessons are even bigger!

Let's look together to discover what God says through this messenger.



Unfinished House of Worship

Turn, if you will, to the book of Haggai. If you can find Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, simply turn back a few pages – before Malachi, before Zechariah, and there it is. Haggai is a short book – only two chapters in length, but its message was a pivotal one for the Jewish community of the time.

To understand this writing, you must understand the historical situation.

Over hundreds of years, God's chosen people (the Israelites/the Jews) had followed their God sporadically. They had a terrible track record of unfaithfulness and wandering! God's faithfulness was absolute, even though the Israelites' faith was not. But the Israelites failed to remain true to God. So, to get their attention, God allowed several things to happen.



To wake them up, God allowed their nation to split into a northern and southern kingdom. To rouse them from their sins, God allowed the northern nation (called Israel) to be overtaken and destroyed by the nation of Assyrian. When that still failed to turn this nation's heart toward Him, God doubled down on His punishments, allowing the southern kingdom (called the nation of Judah) to be conquered and destroyed by the Babylonian empire.

Here's a key date to remember: 586 BC.

In 586 BC, Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon's attacking army. They were thorough, and they were brutal. Not only was the city wiped out and its population decimated, but God's temple was also demolished! The gleaming structure erected by King Solomon, overlaid inside with gold, with massive bronze pillars and intricate, expensive furnishings...home to the most sacred items in the worship of Yahweh God...was crushed and turned to rubble.



“Then his army burned the Temple of God, tore down the walls of Jerusalem, burned all the palaces, and completely destroyed everything of value.” (2 Chronicles 36:19, NLT)

Everything. Destroyed.

Have you ever had a precious possession destroyed? Maybe it was in a fire. Maybe it was accidentally broken. Maybe it torn apart by a roommate or sibling who went on a rampage. Do you remember the feeling of loss? Do you remember the sadness, the grief that something you treasured was now trash?

That's how the Jewish population felt.¹



Jerusalem and Judah were destroyed, and much of the population of Judah was exiled to the capital of the Babylonian empire, where they were to stay for the next seventy years.

For all practical purposes, that should have been the end of the Jews...but God wasn't done with them. He did not destroy completely; He saved a remnant! God allowed the Jews to remain in captivity only as a lesson. But the entire time, He remained faithful. God prompted an unlikely turn of events: after the Babylonians were overtaken by the Persians, the new Persian king, Cyrus, decreed that the Jewish population could return to their homeland and rebuild their temple.



The Old Testament book of Ezra records this exciting event! It shares about their journey home and their actions once they get back. In 538 BC, a small remnant of Jews made the climb up to Mount Zion. They returned to the rubble of Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel (a descendent of the

¹ In the news, you hear about the destruction in Gaza and how Israel demolished everything of value in the past year of war. Today, they are painted as aggressors, but they've been on the other side!

former king of Judah) and Joshua (the high priest). They took a look at the devastation, and then they began the rebuilding process.

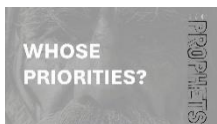
Initially, things went well! The Jews got to work and quickly completed the foundation of the Temple. But then, opposition came. Gentiles (non-Jews) who lived in the area began intimidating the Jews and frustrating their work. They pressured the people to stop...so, the Temple rebuilding project ceased. God's house – Yahweh's Temple – sat waiting, incomplete.

We've all seen abandoned construction projects, where the funding dried up, or where other obstacles halted the work. A week passes, then a month. Next thing you know, years have gone by without any meaningful progress. It's the camper in the backyard all over again!

The Temple's foundation sat in Jerusalem for almost two decades, a memorial to incomplete projects. It was a house in disrepair, a reminder of unfulfilled dreams.

THAT is the backstory! THAT is what you need to know when you start reading the book of Haggai.

Because it is in this context that the prophet Haggai receives a message from God. Eighteen years after their return, Haggai is sent to deliver a fresh message from God.



Whose Priorities?

Let's hear this Word together – I think it is worth hearing directly rather than just hearing a summary:



“On August 29 of the second year of King Darius's reign, the Lord gave a message through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

“This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says:

The people are saying, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord.’”

Then the Lord sent this message through the prophet Haggai:

“Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins?

This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: Look at what's happening to you! You have planted much but harvest little. You eat but are not satisfied. You drink but are still thirsty. You put on clothes but cannot keep warm. Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes!

"This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: Look at what's happening to you! Now go up into the hills, bring down timber, and rebuild my house. Then I will take pleasure in it and be honored, says the Lord. You hoped for rich harvests, but they were poor. And when you brought your harvest home, I blew it away. Why? Because my house lies in ruins, says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, while all of you are busy building your own fine houses. It's because of you that the heavens withhold the dew and the earth produces no crops. I have called for a drought on your fields and hills—a drought to wither the grain and grapes and olive trees and all your other crops, a drought to starve you and your livestock and to ruin everything you have worked so hard to get."

Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of God's people began to obey the message from the Lord their God. When they heard the words of the prophet Haggai, whom the Lord their God had sent, the people feared the Lord. Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave the people this message from the Lord: "I am with you, says the Lord!"

So the Lord sparked the enthusiasm of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the enthusiasm of Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the enthusiasm of the whole remnant of God's people. They began to work on the house of their God, the Lord of Heaven's Armies, on September 21 of the second year of King Darius's reign." (Haggai 1:1–15, NLT)

Haggai's message touches on what we said: The Jews had abandoned the temple reconstruction process. But the lesson isn't just, "Go to Home Depot and start the home improvement process." The spiritual lesson is deeper:

God's priorities must come before ours

The first lesson we learn from the book of Haggai is that **God's priorities must come before ours!**



We must put the **worship of God** before anything else.

Think about this. **Why does God want the house?** For Himself? No! He doesn't require any building or any furnishing the people can provide. His presence is not limited to this building. So, why does He want it?

Worship.

It is so the people can worship Him! Just like we talked about last week, God wants us to have **what is best for us**...and that is Him. The Jews hadn't been able to approach Him (in the way they knew, through the Law) for 88 years. And that means their access to the Best Thing in the universe was limited! God wanted them to have a way to approach Him again.

They had been taking precious time to focus on minor things like their own homes and businesses, but they were **ignoring what mattered most**.

Can you relate?

Like the 6th century Jews, you and I are involved in a spiritual building project. Scripture talks about us building on the foundation of Jesus Christ.



“Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.”
(Ephesians 2:20–21, NLT)

Like the Jews, we have a temple to build! Ours is not a literal one, but a spiritual one. Our lives and our actions build upon the foundation of Christ Jesus.

This is our task. Are we doing it?

The message in Haggai confronts us just as sharply – **are we focusing on building, or are we focused on ourselves?**



Over the years, TCC has challenged you to take the initiative to grow in your spiritual life... or, in this metaphor, to “build the temple.” We challenged you to grow in different areas – **studying** the Bible, **praising** God, **sharing** your faith, **praying** often, **serving** others, **giving** generously, **building** relationships, **accepting** Christ. We encouraged you to work with other Christians **in a group** of some kind (whether a class or a small group) to grow your faith. *Did you?*

- Did you **build your faith**, or did you sidestep Jesus conversations with your family?
- Did you **build your faith**, or did you decide to watch a Royals game instead?
- Did you **build your faith**, or did you use your tithe to buy a new gadget for your favorite hobby?
- Did you **build your faith**, or did you turn a temptation into a habit?
- Did you **build your faith**, or did you turn Sunday worship into an optional activity?
- Did you **build your faith**, or did your prayers stay short and superficial?

Have your actions helped or hindered your pursuit of things with eternal significance? Have they made you spiritually full and vibrant, or spiritually empty and shallow?



If you've built on other things instead of God's priorities, let me ask you: *"How's that going for your life?!"* As you've focused on other priorities, have you noticed any problems, any difficulties? Like the Jews, have your efforts been frustrated? Have your resources seemed scarce? Have your troubles multiplied? And if so, have you made a connection between those troubles and your unfinished foundation?

What blessings has God had to withhold from us to get our attention?! What kind of struggles and discontent have permeated our lives because we were simply too lazy or distracted to put God's priorities first?!

I'm not saying that every difficulty we have is a punishment from God for our lack of growth. I'm not preaching a simplistic model of faith where every challenge is punishment for bad behavior, or where material blessings are always in order when we are doing good. But I see from this passage in Haggai that **God took advantage of every opportunity** to push His people to focus on Him.

ANY difficulty we have in life – whether financial, relational, occupational, physical, or mental - can AND SHOULD serve as a reminder that we need to have our priorities in order.

Let me be clear: **God's priorities must come first.** We must put the **worship of God** before anything else.



If you have neglected His temple by neglecting your personal spiritual growth, then do what Haggai said - **GO GET SOME LUMBER AND START BUILDING!** God is less concerned with your 401(k); he's more concerned with your heart. He is less concerned with your tackle box, your scrapbook pages, your lawn, your vehicle, your waistline, or your vacation; he's more concerned about your soul. **So build!**

- If you said you'd **build your faith in study**, choose a Bible study to start on Sunday or Wednesday later this month.
- If you said you'd **build your faith in service**, talk to someone about serving in Children's ministry.
- If you said you'd **build your faith in evangelism**, pick up the phone and text your unsaved friend to find time for coffee and conversation.
- If you said you'd **build your faith in purity**, install an internet filter on your computer or phone's browsers.

The command to build God's house is no less valid for us than it was for the Jews in the time of Haggai. God expects **His priorities of daily worship** to be placed before our own.

That is a huge lesson we can take from this passage. But there is one more lesson I want you to see, and it comes from Haggai 2.



Whose Perspective?



"Then on October 17 of that same year, the Lord sent another message through the prophet Haggai. "Say this to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of God's people there in the land: 'Does anyone remember this house—this Temple—in its former splendor? How, in comparison, does it look to you now? It must seem like nothing at all! But now the Lord says: Be strong, Zerubbabel. Be strong, Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people still left in the land. And now get to work, for I am with you, says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. My Spirit remains among you, just as I promised when you came out of Egypt. So do not be afraid.'

"For this is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: In just a little while I will again shake the heavens and the earth, the oceans and the dry land. I will shake all the nations, and the treasures of all the nations

will be brought to this Temple. I will fill this place with glory, says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. The future glory of this Temple will be greater than its past glory, says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. And in this place I will bring peace. I, the Lord of Heaven's Armies, have spoken!"" (Haggai 2:1–9, NLT)

Have you ever gone to a fast-food restaurant and ordered based on the pictures? The menu or the screen might show a perfectly crafted burger, with fresh lettuce and crispy bacon lovingly arranged on the plate. Then it comes to you in a greasy wrapper, smashed under the fries...and you open up this sad, wilted sandwich that looks nothing like what inspired you originally.

Most of the Jews who saw their reconstructed Temple felt the same way.



“But many of the older priests, Levites, and other leaders who had seen the first Temple wept aloud when they saw the new Temple’s foundation. The others, however, were shouting for joy. The joyful shouting and weeping mingled together in a loud noise that could be heard far in the distance.” (Ezra 3:12–13, NLT)

Can you imagine the disappointment of the old timers? The temple built by Solomon – the one destroyed by the Babylonians – was built from the finest materials around. The resources were not the same, and the construction was not the same. It had been a gleaming holy mansion; now it seemed like a humble shack. Despite some enthusiasm from younger builders, the new temple was a shadow of its former self.



But God tells them all – the leaders and the people – to “be strong!”

“Work, for I am with you!”

This temple...regardless of its appearance...is approved by God! Its glory comes from **God’s involvement** – not from the skills or the resources of the builders.

- *“**My** spirit is present among you”*
- *“I am going to shake the heavens and earth”*
- *“I will fill this house with glory”*

- “The silver and gold belong to **me**”
- “**I** will provide peace”



God's perspective is more important than ours

God's perspective on the results is that the **outward appearance** is less important than the **working of His own Spirit** and **His own presence**.



“We are confident of all this because of our great trust in God through Christ. It is not that we think we are qualified to do anything on our own. Our qualification comes from God.” (2 Corinthians 3:4-5, NLT)

When you start building your spiritual temple, the results may not be impressive. But listen carefully:

- God doesn't ask us to be **impressive** – just **faithful**.
- He doesn't ask us to be **remarkable** – just **redeemed**.
- He doesn't ask us to **extraordinary** – just to have **extraordinary Power** live within us.



*** THE GLORY COMES FROM HIS PRESENCE! ***

Don't carry the the weight of trying to impress God. Don't compare yourself to spiritual giants and worry about your lack of stature. Don't give up or hold back because you fear that your best won't be good enough.

In other words, don't be like the Jews, looking at their sad temple and feeling like quitting because it's not good enough.

Get to work...because “*I am with you,*” says God!

He prefers baby steps of obedience to self-righteous confidence.

- If you don't study – why not read the rest of Haggai today?
- If you don't tithe – why not give \$20 online right now?
- If your praise is weak – why not sing louder...and (shock) raise a hand?
- If you haven't become a Christian – why not ask a friend about it?

As you build, you can do so with HUMBLE confidence, knowing that you aren't building a house for your own glory; you are building for God. And HE is the one who will provide the glory, not you.

Don't let a skewed perspective on God's expectations stop you from building. Be strong! Work, for God is with you!



Closing

You have a task before you: **BUILD!**

Build His Temple in your life! Put His **priorities** ahead of your own. Don't be distracted from the task. Remember that His glory is not a side quest – worshiping Him is your main objective!

Build His Temple in your life! Keep His **perspective**. Don't be disheartened by your progress. Be strong! Allow God to provide the glory and achieve the results that you can't achieve on your own.

If you do that, trust that God's message in Haggai will still apply:



“The future glory of this Temple will be greater than its past glory, says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. And in this place I will bring peace. I, the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, have spoken!” (Haggai 2:9, NLT)

Prayer

Invitation

Sermon Notes

Unfinished House of Worship

(2 Chronicles 36:19)

Whose Priorities?

(Haggai 1:1-15)

God's priorities must come before ours

(Ephesians 2:20-21)

Whose Perspective?

(Haggai 2:1-9; Ezra 3:12-13)

God's perspective is more important than ours

(2 Corinthians 3:4-5)

THE GLORY COMES FROM HIS PRESENCE

Sermon Discussion Questions

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

- What is a project you started but never finished? What stopped your progress? What would it take for you to pick it back up and bring it to completion?

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- According to Haggai 1, what reason did the people give for not rebuilding the Temple? Was the reason valid?
- What specific difficulties did God say the people were experiencing because they neglected His house? (Haggai 1:6, 1:9–11)
- Why was the rebuilding of the Temple such a priority for God if His presence is not limited to a building?
- Why might the older generation have been discouraged when they saw the new Temple's foundation? (Ezra 3:12–13)
- What “unfinished projects” might you have in your spiritual life right now?
- In what ways are you tempted to prioritize your own “luxurious houses” (comforts, hobbies, routines) over God's priorities?
- Have you ever experienced frustration or lack of satisfaction in life that may have been God's way of getting your attention? How did you respond?
- How can our church community encourage each other to keep building God's “temple” in our lives? What specific building steps could you take this week to strengthen your spiritual life?
- In Haggai 2:1–9, what promises does God give to encourage the builders? How does knowing that God says, “I am with you,” (Haggai 1:13; 2:4) change your motivation for spiritual growth?
- What does it mean for you personally to “be strong” and “get to work” as God told His people?
- How can you guard against discouragement when your progress doesn't look impressive by human standards?

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Pray for your brothers and sisters in the church to take the initiative to build, following God's directions and using the foundation of Jesus Christ.