

Through the Bible @ 30,000 Feet

Haggai | *Don't Waste Your Life*

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Turn to **2 Chronicles 36**

Elizabeth and I celebrated our 14th wedding anniversary on Tuesday this past week, and I was reflecting on all the time and energy and money we have poured into the places that we have lived. I enjoy construction projects and landscaping, and Liz has a gift for interior design and decorating...which means we are a pretty good team.

When we moved into our home in Nebraska in our early 20's, the house looked like an old farmhouse on a very plain lot in town. When we left for Minneapolis in our early 30's, that old house looked totally different. Our kitchen, dining room, and bathroom could have been in a magazine. We designed and built a sound-proof music recording studio in the upstairs, and then right next to the studio we built a loft with a big window that overlooked the river in the distance.

For all the time that I spent working on the house, I probably spent even more time working on our backyard. We built a beautiful paver stone patio which was surrounded by red lava rock and tiki torches. Next to the patio, I spent hundreds of hours building a series of cascading waterfalls that flowed down into a pond filled with Koi. I built a massive tree house with a pirate ladder and a rock-climbing wall. We about a quarter of our backyard and poured a massive slab of concrete, and then I bought the equipment to paint all the lines for halfcourt basketball. We built a raised garden bed in another corner. And in another corner, I built a beautiful chicken coup with a two-bedroom henhouse and a separate loft (for our homing pigeons). And I was in the process of building a waterfall and pond inside the chicken coup when we left.

I can only image the hours and the dollars I poured into that home during the years we were there.

We see a very similar picture as we enter the story of Haggai. We a bunch of people working hard on their fancy homes. However, their homes seem out of place with the rest of the scenery. While they are working on their fancy homes, the fields around them are desolate. Their barns are empty. And at the center of everything is the Temple of God...in ruins.

What happened? Why are God's people living in fancy homes surrounded by drought & desolation? And what happened to the Temple? Why was it destroyed, and why aren't God's people working to rebuilding it?

We get the answers in **2 Chronicles 36:14-23**

We have been following the story of God's people from their creation, their calling, their slavery, their rescue, their journey through the wilderness, their victory in the promised land, the judges, the kings, their constant rebellion, the prophets warning the people that if they didn't repent of their rebellion and turn to God – that He was going to raise up the Babylon army to come in and destroy the land.

Well, the people continued in their trajectory of rebellion, and so God's Word finally came to pass.

The entire history of Israel's captivity is summed up in **2 Chronicles 36:14–23**:

Moreover, all the leaders of the priests and the people transgressed more and more, according to all the abominations of the nations, and defiled the house of the LORD which He had consecrated in Jerusalem. And the LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy.

Therefore, He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand. And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon.

Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions. And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, **to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah**, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate, she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

So, the land was destroyed. The Temple was demolished & burned. The wall was in ruins. And the people were living as captives in Babylon. But God wasn't done with them!

In fact, around 200 years earlier, **ISAIAH** had prophesied that God would raise up a man named **Cyrus** who would conquer the oppressive nations (like Babylon) and cause God's people to rebuild the Temple.

Let me read you this prophesy in Isaiah, and as you listen, remember that Isaiah is speaking long before the Temple was destroyed, long before Babylon was a military threat, long before Israel was taken captive, and long before Cyrus was even born.

Read **ISAIAH 44:24–28**

And that's exactly what happened. Let's finish reading here in **2 Chronicles 36** (vs. 22–23)

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the **LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia**, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!

Before we turn to Haggai, we need to see WHY God raised up Cyrus, the King of Persia, to capture Babylon and then allow God's people to return home...

Cyrus says, "**He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem.**"

They weren't set free primarily to rebuild their own lives back in Jerusalem; they were set free to worship: to rebuild the center of their worship.

Before Jesus came and restored our relationship with God through His death on the cross, the Temple stood as the center of their relationship with God.

- This is where they would go to pray.
- This is where they would go to make sacrifice for sin.
- This is where they would go to worship.

And this is what they were made for.

- They were made for God. WE were made for God.
- We were made to know Him. To see Him. To talk to Him. To listen to Him. To love Him. To trust Him. To obey Him. To be in relationship with Him.
- This is what Isaiah meant when he said that we were made for His glory (**43:7**)
- And, before Jesus came and restored our access to God, the Temple was the center of God's relationship with His people.

Which means...there was no higher priority for God's people than to rebuild the temple. And this was why King Cyrus set them free.

- In 538 BC, King Cyrus gives the decree to rebuild the temple.
- For one reason or another, most of the people end up staying in Babylon. But a man named **Zerubbabel** leads a remnant back to Jerusalem, and in 536 BC (two years later), they were ready to start rebuilding the Temple.

We read this story in the book of Ezra (*for all of you who remember!*)

- They're back in the land.
- They're rebuilding the temple.
- But then... it starts getting hard.
 - Which is what always happens when you invest your life into the worship of God.
 - Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble."

Well...as they were rebuilding the Temple, they started running into hardships.

- First, they were discouraged by the people who should have been their biggest encouragers (**Ezra 3:12–13**).
- Then the neighboring nations started working against them (**4:1–5**).
- Eventually, their adversaries sent a nasty letter to King Artaxerxes, the new king in Persia, falsely accusing the Jews of building a "rebellious and evil city" (**4:6–23**). Convinced of their lies, the king's men "went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease." In the face of such overwhelming opposition, God's people finally quit.

Ezra 4:24 says,

Thus, the work of the house of God which *is* at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

The temple (the center of their worship) was left untouched for years and years. And then Haggai comes on the scene.

Read **Haggai 1:1–4**

Two things we see:

1. **Their excuses:** “*It’s not the right time.*”
 - God had freed them from Babylon | just as He promised (**JEREMIAH**)
 - He had raised up Cyrus | just as He promised (**ISAIAH**)
 - He had called them to rebuild the temple.

And they started to, but when obedience became hard, they decided “it must not be the right time.”

- They were good at obeying when obedience was easy, but when obedience became hard – they finally quit.

- That’s so convicting for me because I do that all the time.
 - I’m a really patient person when people are doing everything just the way I want them to.
 - I’m a really forgiving person when nobody is doing anything wrong against me.
 - I never struggle with lusting after a woman...when I’m on a camping trip in the middle of nowhere all by myself.
 - I love giving generously of our finances to the ministry of the church in the spread of the gospel...when we have plenty of money in our bank account.
- But whenever any of these things gets hard...it’s so easy for me to throw in the towel and justify my disobedience.

- I know God has called me to forgive, **but** this person has hurt me so deeply...
- I know God called us to build the Temple, **but** it must not be the right time...

2. **Their priorities:** “*Their paneled houses*”

It wasn’t the right time to invest into God’s house, but it **was** the right time to spend their time and energy and money and resources on making their own lives more comfortable...???

God’s work was hard work, and so they decided to save that for another day and spend their lives investing into themselves.

Let's take the spotlight off of them and turn it onto ourselves for just a minute.

TWO APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

1. How are you investing your life?

- Bigger homes. Fancier cars. Better vacations.
- New experiences. More possessions.
- Greater skill in your hobbies. Greater success in your job.
- Romance. Sexual pleasure.
- Screens: movies, television shows, video games, social media...
- Brighter future for your children.
- Easier retirement.

It's not that all of these things are necessarily bad.

It's that none of these things are meant to be a priority in your life.

- You weren't made for success. You were made for God.
- You weren't made for your family. You were made for God.
- You weren't made for your hobbies – or your friends – or your home – or your vacations – or your cell phone – or your retirement... you were made for God: to know Him, love Him, worship Him.

So, what are you doing to invest your life into knowing God?

- How much time do you invest in God's Word?
- How much time do you invest into God's people?
- How much time do you invest in the Great Commission?
- How much time do you invest into prayer?

2. What excuses are you giving to God?

- I'm just too busy.
- I'm just focused on my family right now.
- I'm not qualified. I'm not ready.
- It's not my job. | “*It's not my job to evangelize.*”

Haggai looks at the temple (in ruins), and then he looks at their beautiful homes...and he can't believe what he sees. And he can't believe their excuses.

Read Haggai 1:5–11

You've spent all this time and energy and money pouring into the comforts of your life... and (in the end) none of it satisfies.

- You looked for much, but...
- You never have enough. You never feel satisfied. You never feel filled up.
- After all that you've invested into your life, at the end of the day...it doesn't *make* you happy. And it certainly doesn't *keep* you happy.

Meanwhile, the God (in whose presence is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore) is being neglected. For years...

Haggai's message to God's people then – and his message to us today – is:

“Don't waste your life.”

When you spend your life living for your own pleasures, it's like taking your hard-earned money and putting it into a bag full of holes.

You only get one life.

In His amazing grace, God give us a million chances, but we only get one life...

- One life to share the hope of Jesus with the lost.
- One life to raise our children to know Jesus as the supreme treasure of the universe.
- One life to serve the church. One life to make disciples of the nations.
- One life to obey Him – even when it's hard and scary and confusing.

And, actually, that's exactly how this chapter ends.

In **Haggai 1:12–15**, the most wonderful thing happens: the people listen and obey!

Oh, that that would be our story when God's word convicts us.

CHAPTER TWO

I think the main theme of chapter 2 is that **Jesus is better than everything you leave behind.**

As the temple is being built, many of the people were growing more and more discouraged because it wasn't looking anything like it used to. Solomon's Temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world. The pillars, the exotic wood, the gold, the jewels, the architecture, the craftsmanship, the detail...the Temple that they remembered was stunning in every way.

And this new temple...was looking like nothing in comparison (**2:3**).

And in their discouragement, God comes to them with this word of encouragement: *Jesus is better.*

Read Haggai 2:1–9

This temple (that you are building right now) will be even more glorious than Solomon's temple.

Q. How can that be?

If you were to go back in time and look at the floor of Solomon's Temple, you would have seen pure gold (**1 Kings 6:30**).

But if these people could go forward in time and look at the floor of this Temple that they were building, they would have seen the feet of Jesus.

500 years later, a man & a woman carried a baby into the Temple to present Him to the Lord, and this baby's Name was Jesus (**Luke 2:22**).

And then as a young boy, there was a day when Joseph & Mary found Jesus teaching the religious leaders (**Luke 2:46–50**).

Yes, the old Temple was glorious, but the Son of God Himself will stand in this Temple, and He is infinitely better than all the gold and all the silver in all the world.

God strengthen His people in their work with the hope that “*the Desire of All Nations*” would come to this temple.

What is the “Desire of all nations”? What is the “wealth of all nations?”

- **Revelation** answers that question.
- One day, every nation will be represented around the throne, and they will be singing the song of the Lamb saying “Jesus is better” than all power, wisdom, authority, riches, honor, fame...”

The **main theme** of chapter two is “**Jesus is Better**” | better than anything you have in your life **right now**, better than anything you have ever left **behind**, and better than anything waiting for you in the **future**.

- a. Knowing Jesus is better than being the most popular person in your school
- b. Serving Jesus is better than being successful in your career.
- c. Having a relationship with Jesus is better than the best relationship you could ever dream of having on this earth
- d. Jesus is better than your toys. He's better than your hobbies.
- e. Obeying Jesus brings more lasting pleasure than any pleasure you could ever dream of experiencing in this life.

And, oh, how often I need to remind myself of this.

- Jesus is better than possessions.
- Jesus is better than money.
- Jesus is better than pornography...or any other sexual pleasure.
- Jesus is better than popularity.

And Jesus is better than anything I leave behind.

- Jesus is better than Nebraska.
- And if He ever calls us to leave Minnesota, Jesus will be better than what we leave behind.
- He is better than the best paying job you leave behind.
- He is better than all the comforts of home and the promises of the American dream.

You only get one life. Don't waste it.

Spend it on the glory of God, and you will find that Jesus is infinitely better.