

Consider Your Ways

Haggai 1:1-6

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In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest: ² “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? ⁵ Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. ⁶ You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

Do you know the word Bethel is literally translated House of God from Hebrew? Beth is translated *house* and El is translated *God*.

The Church is the household of God or to borrow Haggai’s language - the Church is the house of the Lord. Paul writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:15 that the church is the *pillar* and the *buttress* of truth.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:19-21 that “you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the *household* of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord”.

Jesus Christ is the Head and Founder of His Church. Jesus founded His Church at a great cost to himself. Acts 20:28 “the church of God, which he (Jesus) obtained with his own blood”

“Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are *his* house..” Hebrews 3:6

The house of God, the church, is the only place where your spiritual life and character, your godliness, your holiness, your Gospel witness is formed, shaped and matured.

From an Old Covenant perspective, the temple of God was where God’s presence was there. God instituted the Temple worship for ancient Israel according to the Old Covenant. And in the New Covenant you are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Before we begin to expound on this passage, let me give us some context.

The prophet Haggai is writing to the people of Israel who have returned from exile. Exile. What is that? The Old Covenant had two very specific stipulations – blessings for obedience (meaning they get to stay and enjoy the land God had given them) OR curses for disobedience (meaning exile to another land under a foreign king).

Sadly, Israel disobeys and grieves God to no extent. And God sends both the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah into exile. The Northern kingdom of Israel first goes into exile in the year 722 BC and the Southern kingdom of Judah follows into exile in the year 586 BC. However, God does not banish them permanently. God promised to restore them, to bring them back one day.

Deuteronomy chapter thirty, verses one through five is a good summary of God’s intentions for Israel even after exile.

And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, ² and return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, ³ then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. ⁴ If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. ⁵ And the Lord your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers” Deuteronomy 30:1-5

So in the year 539 BC, some exiles begin returning to Jerusalem. Cyrus was the Persian king who had allowed the Jews to return and even build the temple. A year later, in 538BC, the exiles lay the foundation of the temple. The building project began with much fanfare and celebration.

“And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid” Ezra 4:11

However, opposition to the work begins right after the foundation was laid. And the work stops. Ezra 4:4 *“Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build ⁵ and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia”*

This is when God sends his word to Haggai the prophet.

Verse one.

In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest:

This is the year 520 BC. You see four key men mentioned here. Darius the King. Zerubbabel the governor representing the civil government. Joshua the high priest representing the religious authority and Haggai the prophet. Haggai is very precise about the date God's word came to Haggai. In the second year, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month. Scholars say the exact date is August 29, 520 BC. Yes it is that exact. Today there too many voices that want your attention but it is God's voice that we must heed and turn to. That voice is the Word of God.

Notice the word of the Lord came to Zerubabbel.

Why does God's Word come to Zerubabbel? He was the man who had the authority to begin the work. Zerubabbel is from David's line. He is also the man mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke.

What was the message from the prophet?

Verses two through four.

² *"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?"* ⁵ *Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways.*

Thus says the Lord of hosts! This phrase indicates an all knowing God.

Notice, the Lord says, "these people". This phrase is rather interesting because God would address his people as "my people".

The message to Zerubbabel was that people began the work of the temple and decided by themselves to stop building.

The temple was indicative of God's presence. During the days of Moses, there was no temple but God's presence was there in the tabernacle. And it was during Solomon's time, the first temple was built and God's presence was still there. However, as the people grew disobedient and unfaithful to God, God could not stand the presence of sin and the abominations they were committing. God drives the people into exile and His presence

leaves. But God's love for them never left them. He promised to bring them back and restore the worship. Zerubbabel is the representative of the people. They began the work but as soon as opposition came, they stopped the work.

In verses three and four, God contrasts the place of worship with their place of dwelling. The people had returned and built houses but the house of God was in ruins. The paneled houses meant they had roofs over their houses but God's house had no roof. The first temple was built with panels of cedar the finest of wood.

The repetition of the phrase "Thus says the Lord of hosts" is for emphases. They need to pay attention to God. Rejecting building God's temple is like rejecting God himself.

And God tells the people to reflect on their ways. Consider your ways. The exiles were failing to see the higher ways of God.

Isaiah 55:8 *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD."*

So Haggai tells the people to consider their ways.

Ponder what has taken priority in your life. What path have you taken.

Verse six tells us what had become of them when they ignore the ways of God.

⁶You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

Late August was harvest season for the returned exiles. And these Israelites were not impoverished. They lived in reasonably good houses. They were able to plant but the harvest was small. They were able to eat but not satisfied. They had enough to drink but never fulfilled. They had clothes to wear but never feeling warm. They made money but it seemed to slip from them.

This is the tragedy of an unfulfilled life. Having enough but never content.

It is said that the wealthy man Rockefeller once said, "I have made millions but have no happiness".

What was the problem?

They did not give priority to God's house. Therefore, God withheld the blessing.

The external opposition was not the biggest issue. This was an internal heart issue with the Israelites.

Haggai's message to the exiles is so applicable to our day today.

Are you busying yourself with your own interests, your agenda to the extent that God gets secondary place?

Remember the words the Jesus in Mathew chapter six.

²⁵ *“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

As New Covenant believers, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. 1 Corinthians 3:16

“you yourselves like living stones are being *built* up as a spiritual house”. 1 Peter 2:4

We must allow the Word of God to confront us, to disturb our security, to undermine our complacency and to overthrow our patterns of thought and behavior. – John Stott

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Consider Your Ways. Haggai 1:1-6

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What parallels can you draw from God's temple in the Old Testament and the New Testament? Exodus 40:34, 1 Kings 8:10, 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:20, 2 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 2:21

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

1. What are some ways we should use our bodies to be built up for God? Romans 6:12, 12:1, 2 Corinthians 7:1
2. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

1. For personal reflection: Do you see any area(s) in your life that needs a change in priority or direction so that God is first?