

Scripture Lesson Text

HAG. 1:1 In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying,

2 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built.

3 Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying,

4 *Is it* time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house *lie* waste?

5 Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.

6 Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that

earneth wages earneth wages to *put it* into a bag with holes.

7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.

8 Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.

9 Ye looked for much, and, lo *it* came to little; and when ye brought *it* home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that *is* waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.

10 Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed *from* her fruit.

11 And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon *that* which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.

NOTES

Haggai Calls for Faithful Service

Lesson Text: Haggai 1:1-11

Related Scriptures: Leviticus 26:14-45; Deuteronomy 28:15-51;
Romans 8:28-39

TIME: 520 B.C.

PLACE: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—"Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?" (Haggai 1:3-4).

Lesson Exposition

THE PEOPLE'S ATTITUDE— Hag. 1:1-6

A false view of timing (Hag. 1:1-2). In this brief book we find four messages from the prophet, with this week's text being the first. It was not until the coming forth of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah some sixteen years later that the work began once again and the temple was completed (5:1-2; 6:14-15). It was the sixth month of Darius's second year.

Haggai's challenge had begun with a quotation of an assertion made by those who were living in Jerusalem and not doing anything about the temple. Haggai specifically addressed Zerubbabel, the civil leader, and Joshua, the high priest, pointing out that the people were using excuses for not getting back to the building project. They were claiming the time was not yet right for doing so. Haggai made it clear that the message from God held a divine rebuke of His people and showed His displeasure with them.

A question about their timing (Hag. 1:3-4). Is it not amazing that some people attribute their lack of action to God's leading? When the people said it was not yet the right time to work on the temple, they were in reality using somewhat pious-sounding reasoning as an excuse for their unwillingness or laziness concerning the temple. The truth was that they had replaced the priority of God's work with personal preferences regarding their own projects. God's work had taken second place to their own desires.

Haggai was now challenging them to rethink their priorities. While they claimed the time was not right for working on the temple, they were at the same time building themselves lavish homes. Haggai presented a question that, like the statement he had just uttered, had come from the Lord of Hosts: "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?" (Hag. 1:4). The key word is "cieled." The Hebrew word refers to interior paneling such

as wainscoting, that is, lavish wooden panels lining the walls of the rooms of their houses.

A challenge to rethink their timing (Hag. 1:5-6). Through Haggai, the Lord repeatedly admonished the people of Judah, “Consider your ways” (1:5, 7; cf. 2:15, 18 [twice]). A woodenly literal rendering of this phrase reads, “Set your heart upon your ways,” that is, on the road you have chosen to travel. They needed to think seriously about their thoughts and lack of action. It was a matter of utmost importance to God; therefore, they needed to re-evaluate carefully and make whatever changes were necessary to get in line with His purposes.

If they looked at the reality of their circumstances, they would see that God was withholding blessing from them. They had been doing the right things in order to provide for themselves, but they had not been experiencing the results they were expecting from their labors.

They sowed plenty of seed to have good crops, but they were not getting those good crops. They were able to eat regularly, but it was never sufficient. They were able to drink regularly, but there was not enough to satisfy them. They had clothing, but it was not enough to totally provide the covering they needed in order to be warm and comfortable. The money they earned never seemed enough to meet all their needs and certainly not enough to provide anything extra.

The Lord compared the situation to putting money in a bag with holes in it. It allowed the money to fall through and disappear. All this was evidence of His displeasure and their need to rearrange the priorities of their lives. While God today often works differently from the way He did in Old Testament times, sometimes we should examine our priorities when things are going

badly. Perhaps God withholds blessing from us at times when we have allowed something other than Him to become the top priority in our lives.

GOD’S RESPONSE TO THEIR ATTITUDE—Hag. 1:7-11

God’s will declared (Hag. 1:7-8). For the second time, God told the people to consider their ways. They needed to reflect deeply on the way they had been handling the most important thing in life—specifically, accomplishing God’s will for them.

Upon issuing this second challenge to consider what they were doing, God gave them specific instructions to follow that would enable them to fulfill His will in this matter. The instructions were simple and concise: they were to go up into the mountains, bring wood from there down into the city, and use it for the rebuilding of the temple.

We cannot help wondering why they had to get wood from the mountains, since King Cyrus of Persia had originally authorized getting wood from Sidon and Tyre (Ezra 3:7). Had they used up that provision of wood on their own houses? In light of these messages from Haggai at this time, it is easy to speculate that this is what happened. Now they would have to use their own forests.

God stated that their obedience to these instructions would give Him pleasure and glorify Him. He challenged them, gave them clear instructions for correcting what was wrong, and promised His pleasure in their obedience.

God’s chastening explained (Hag. 1:9). We often find it easier to adjust our lives to God’s will when we can understand exactly why we need to change things and what is expected of us. Sometimes we sense God leading us in a different direction without giving us clear indications as to why He is doing so. That requires a deeper level of

faith on our part; when we follow such leading, we grow in our understanding of Him and His ways. For the people of Judah, God gave a clear explanation of why He wanted things to be different.

What God had said through His prophet earlier (Hag. 1:6), He explained again here (vs. 9). Even though they had been faithful and diligent in preparing their crops and doing their work to earn wages, their expectations for return were not being met. He said they were eagerly looking for "much." But instead of a rich harvest, He said, they were getting "little." Their level of increase was not measuring up to what they needed and hoped for.

God then added that what little increase they did realize, He blew away. The picture is of someone blowing on something and scattering it all around. Then He asked the question they probably had on their minds: "Why?" He answered by stating clearly that the reason He was actively moving against them was the ruined condition of His house.

There is an emphatic contrast between the house of the Lord that lay in ruins and the busyness of the people in caring for their houses. God left no room for doubt about why He was withholding His blessings upon these people. They had put all their attention and effort into their own houses while neglecting His. It was clear that their only course of action was to get busy on the temple!

God's actions detailed (Hag. 1:10-11). There follows quite an extensive list of hardships because of God's displeasure with His people. Almost everything important to them was being negatively affected. God was hitting them where it would hurt them the most because He wanted to get their attention and persuade them to change. The heavens were not sending dew upon the land, the earth was

not producing fruit, and a divinely caused drought was affecting many things important to the people.

What was promised to them if they were obedient can be seen in Deuteronomy 7:13-14. The list includes the things that now were examples of suffering.

On the other hand, Joel 1:18-20 describes the terrible conditions that God would bring upon His people if they stopped doing what He asked of them. They were currently experiencing all that God had warned them about. They had been looking out for their own interests and ignoring the things that would honor God long enough.

—Keith E. Eggert.

QUESTIONS

1. At what point in Judah's history did Haggai minister?
2. The temple was left in incomplete condition. Why did the people of Judah say this was OK?
3. What did Haggai say they were viewing as their first priority instead of rebuilding the temple?
4. What phrase did Haggai use several times in challenging the people to rethink priorities?
5. What circumstances showed that God was not blessing them?
6. How did God compare their lack to a money bag?
7. What did God specifically tell them to do about their situation?
8. How did God explain the chastening they were getting from Him?
9. What emphatic contrast explained their wrongdoing?
10. What specific things had God done to get their attention?

—Keith E. Eggert.

PRACTICAL POINTS

Golden Text Illuminated

1. It is important not only to start God's work but also to finish it (Hag. 1:1; cf. Ezra 3:8-13).
2. Man's excuses may fool others but never God (Hag. 1:2).
3. Our actions—rather than our words—are the best indicator of our priorities (vss. 3-4).
4. The wise man regularly examines his actions, priorities, and loyalties (vss. 5-6).
5. True repentance requires full obedience (vss. 7-8).
6. God's people should expect God's discipline when they disobey (Hag. 1:9-11; cf. Prov. 3:12; Heb. 12:6).

—Don Kakavecos.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What might have been some of the reasons for the work on the temple not being finished when Haggai spoke to the people in 520 B.C. (Hag. 1:1-3; cf. Ezra 4:1-6, 24)?
2. Why did God twice tell His people to consider their ways? Why should we consider our own ways (cf. II Cor. 13:5; Gal. 6:4; I Thess. 5:21)? What should be the purpose of our examination (cf. Lam. 3:40; Eph. 5:10)?
3. What do you think happened to the wood that had been purchased some sixteen years earlier for the rebuilding of the temple (Hag. 1:4; cf. Ezra 3:7)?
4. How did God react specifically to His people's disobedience (Hag. 1:9-11)?

—Don Kakavecos.

“Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?” (Haggai 1:3-4).

The background of this text is the return of the exiles from their years of captivity. The Israelites returned, hoping to restore the temple that had been destroyed.

However, the effort got bogged down. Through a combination of opposition, discouragement, and neglect, some years after they returned, the temple still was not finished. God raised up Haggai to speak to the rulers and the people about this unacceptable state of affairs.

The word spoken was an authoritative word; in fact, it is called the very “word of the Lord.” It was also a reproving word. God was not pleased. The people were dwelling in “cieled” houses while God's house lay ruined and unfinished. The irony is powerful. The Hebrew term used for “cieled” means “to cover over.” The idea is that all the houses of the Israelites were covered over with finished products. They were complete and beautified for occupation. Yet God's house still was not ready.

The rebuke was clear. It was time to act. The time had come and gone when Israel should have risen to the challenge.

We must learn to be obedient people who respond quickly, taking action with regard to those things God has spoken to us about. Much good will be done if we just rise up and serve, living as Christians in a needy world.

—Jeff VanGoethem.