

# The Temple Rebuilt

Printed Text · Haggai 1:1-4, 7-10, 12-15

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXPLORE why God withheld His blessings from His people; SENSE times when our own ambitions are contrary to God's plans for us; and DECIDE that we will do exactly as God has commanded.

## In Focus

Alex's favorite thing to do was play the video games his parents Marcus and Felicia bought him for his birthday. He planned to do nothing else but play video games during spring break. When it was time for family devotions, he was upset. It took him away from his games. He copped an attitude at prayer time too. On Sunday morning, Alex whined that he didn't want to go to church.

"I want to stay at home," he mumbled from underneath his covers.

"And do what?" Marcus asked.

"Play video games," he said with a dreamy smile.

"No way, that is unacceptable," Felicia said.

Marcus and Felicia confiscated Alex's games for one week. At first, Alex was really upset. But during the week, he started to notice all he'd missed doing since he got them.

As he made his bed he heard his brother and sister laughing in the hallway. He hadn't played with them in a while. He hadn't been outside with his friends in a while, either. He even stopped talking with his mom and dad like he used to.

"Man, I've gotta get things right again," Alex said.

He began to spend more time with family and friends, so the week went by faster than Alex had expected. When his parents returned his video games, he didn't want to play them as much.

Today's lesson teaches us the importance of refocusing our priorities on God.

## Keep In Mind

"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" (Haggai 1:8, KJV).

## Words You Should Know

- A. **Time** (Haggai 1:2) 'e t h (Heb.) — Now or due time.
- B. **Cieled** (v.4) caphan (Heb.) — Covered.
- C. **Waste** (v. 4) chareb (Heb.) — Desolate.
- D. **Messenger** (v. 13) mal'ak (Heb.) — A bearer of news.

## Say It Correctly

**Zerubbabel.** zuh-RUB-uh-buhl

**Unleavened.** muhn-LEH-vnd

## KJV

**Haggai 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,

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. 5 The just Lord is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame.

12 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord.

13 Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord.

14 And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God,

15 In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

## NLT

**Haggai 1:1** 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.

2 "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.'"

3 Then the Lord sent this message through the prophet Haggai:

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

7 "This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: Look at what's happening to you!

8 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.

9 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.

10 It's because of you that the heavens withhold the dew and the earth produces no crops.

12 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.

13 Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave the people this message from the Lord: "I am with you, says the Lord!"

14 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, 15 on September 21 of the second year of King Darius's reign.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Haggai.** Haggai was an Old Testament prophet and author of the book of Haggai. The name Haggai is derived from the Hebrew word hag, meaning "feast" or "festival." This term usually refers to the three pilgrimage feasts of the Jewish religious calendar (Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of Weeks, and Feast of Tabernacles). The prophet may have been born during the celebration of one of these feasts. As God's spokesman, Haggai encouraged the captives who returned to Jerusalem to complete the reconstruction of the temple.

**Remnant.** The part of a community or nation that remains after a dreadful judgment or devastating calamity, especially those who have escaped and remain to form the nucleus of a new community. The survival of a righteous remnant rests solely on God's providential care for His chosen people and His faithfulness to keep His covenant promises.

**Zerubbabel.** Zerubbabel became the Persian governor of Judah under Darius, and was placed in charge of the returning Jews and given the title "Governor of Judah." After much delay, Zerubbabel succeeded in leading the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem in the sixth century B.C. (see Ezra 3:8–10 and Haggai 1:14). This reconstruction lasted longer than the temples of Solomon and Herod the Great combined.

## Background

The Lord had provided wondrously for the Children of Israel, but they sinned against Him. In His mercy, He promised to deliver them from the hands of their captors. He also gave careful instruction through the prophets regarding how and when to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Once the captives were allowed to return to Jerusalem, they set up an altar and laid the Temple foundation. The work of rebuilding the Temple started shortly after the first exiles returned from Babylon in 538 B.C., but the building activity was soon abandoned because of discouragement and oppression as they faced multiple fronts of opposition. They became so frustrated that even when the opposition was lifted, they were slow in rebuilding the Temple. They settled comfortably into their own homes and were content to neglect the Temple work. It is this breach of promise that is addressed in today's lesson. Beginning in 520 B.C., Haggai and his fellow prophet Zechariah urged the people to resume the task. The Temple was completed four years later in about 516 B.C. (see Ezra 5:1; 6:15).

### At-A-Glance

1. The Message of the Prophet (Haggai 1:1–4)
2. A Prophetic Challenge (vv. 7–10)
3. Obedience and Transformation (vv. 12–15)

### In Depth

#### 1. The Message of the Prophet (Haggai 1:1–4)

The book of Haggai had a message for the Hebrew people who returned from the exile imposed by Babylon in 586 B.C. Even though the Hebrew people had more than 70 years in captivity to learn about the priority of divine things, they returned to their old pattern of misplaced priorities,

and a few years after returning from exile again, misunderstood their purpose. Haggai's prophecies declared God's displeasure with Judah's ingratitude.

God made it clear through King Cyrus that the reason for the return was to rebuild the house of the Lord and to resume worship in it. But after the people received their freedom, they put other priorities before those of God and made excuses for not doing God's task. The first excuse was that there was no time. They basically said, "What is the rush? It can wait." They had been freed from physical bondage, but they were still bound by the tyranny of time. It is amazing how we suddenly acquire the gift of patience when it comes to doing the things that God has commanded us!

The returning remnant could not say they did not know how to go about the work, because God had given them specific instructions on how to do it. They could not say that they had no money, because God had provided the monies. They could not say that they had no experts, for God had provided skilled workers. In spite of all the providential preparation, they said that it was not time yet to rebuild.

Their own comfort had become their god. In short, they had become their own god. What they wanted took precedence over what God wanted. Look at the way God poses the question to them in verse 4: "Is it time for you . . . ?" This implies that it was not an issue of time but of their view of God's place in their lives. Such an attitude calls for self-examination.

## **2. A Prophetic Challenge (vv. 7–10)**

This call to self-examination implies that if the Hebrew people weighed things carefully, they would notice their way was not working; they struggled to maintain the bare minimum. God, having been put on the back shelf, was withholding His blessings. These people were like so many of us; we want the gifts but not the Giver. We need to be reminded that God is our source. We must keep in mind that God is the reason we have what we possess. How soon we forget!

God revealed that there was an imbalance in their lives because of their procrastination and disobedience. In verses 7 and 8, He tells how they can get back on track. First, He tells them, "Consider your ways." Second, He tells them to prioritize. There was a way of escape from their hopelessness. God says to go and "build the house" (v. 8). Notice that God does not change the command; He merely gives them a second chance. Obedience to God realigns us with His will and puts us in the place where we are able to receive from the Lord.

They were in trouble, which they had brought upon themselves. They chose their own houses instead of God's house. The desolation of God's house led to the desolation of their houses. Everything that happened to them directly related to something they did or refused to do in relation to God. He had provided everything they needed, yet there was not a house for Him. The law of recompense was in progress: they reaped what they sowed.

## **3. Obedience and Transformation (vv. 12–15)**

God is pleased when we hear His rebuke and repent. The people repented after Haggai revealed what God was saying to them. They did what God said to do; they considered their ways. Haggai then assured them of God's presence (v. 13). Once the people obeyed, God reassured them by saying, "I am with you." This reassurance caused the people to complete the work they started. Their spirits were stirred, and they were ready to work.

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. When did the events in today's lesson take place (Haggai 1:1)?
2. What contrast did God draw between His house and the houses of the returning remnant (v. 4)?
3. When was the temple completed (v. 15)?
4. What were the people to do, and how was God going to respond (vv. 7–10)?

### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. Why does God say He "blew" on what they had (v. 9)? How does this relate to what we gain through ill-placed priorities?
2. What does the procrastination of these returnees say about how people regard God's grace and favor?
3. Why do you think God was so patient? How is He patient with us?

### **Liberating Lesson**

If we are honest with ourselves, we will discover that many (not all) of the calamities we face are a direct result of our disobedience to God's Word. God has told us the way to succeed, but we have chosen to go our own way. He says, "Left," and we say, "Right." He says, "Up," and we say, "Down." He says, "No," and we say, "Yes." Consider a time when God revealed His desire that you build a life that honored Him, but you failed to obey. How did your disobedience manifest itself in other areas of your life? How have you learned to heed God's voice? What advice can you give others to do the same?

### **Application For Activation**

Make a list of some circumstances in your life that are not going favorably. Search the Scriptures beginning with today's lesson, asking God to reveal where you should honor Him in your life. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the courage and determination to make God's priorities your priorities and to lift your anxiety as you focus more on being in His will. Keep a prayer journal during this time to record the changes and encouragement God gives you spiritually and physically as you see Him change you in the midst of the situation.

### **Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

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### **Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

### Haggai 1:1–4, 7–10, 12–15

**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,

This text describes events that took place during the second year of the reign of King Darius, ruler of the Medo-Persian Empire. As was customary, Haggai dated his prophecy by identifying the ruling power of his day. Darius was relatively new to the throne at the time the Lord directed Haggai to speak to the people regarding the repair of the temple. This center of worship had been desecrated by Nebuchadnezzar when Judah was taken captive in about 586 B.C. At that time the temple was sacked and the sacred artifacts of worship were taken to Babylon. Babylon fell to Persia in about 539 B.C. It was in this succession of wars and kings that formed the Persian Empire, which Darius led starting in 522 B.C.

Jerusalem was central to the religious and national identity of the Hebrew people. Even in their Diaspora (or scattering abroad) whenever they prayed, they faced the direction of Jerusalem because the Temple and, therefore, God's presence, was there (see 1 Kings 8:48 and Jonah 2:7). When King Cyrus began allowing the people to return, their primary concern was with repairing the Temple of God.

In about 537 B.C., King Cyrus issued a decree allowing a remnant of the Hebrew captives and their offspring to return to Jerusalem. This group immediately made an altar to offer sacrifices, and soon thereafter laid the foundation for a restructured temple. Their return and work to rebuild the temple, however, precipitated anger and opposition by the Samaritans. These descendants of the northern kingdom of Israel had already repopulated Jerusalem after their return from captivity. When the captives from the southern kingdom of Judah returned and resumed work on the Temple, the Samaritans claimed they wanted to help with the rebuilding effort. However, because the Samaritans were not considered "true Israel," their request was rejected (see Ezra 4).

Opposition continued to frustrate efforts until finally a letter was sent by the Samaritans to King Artaxerxes asking a halt to the work. When Artaxerxes complied by issuing a decree, the work on the Temple stopped (see Ezra 4). Fourteen years later, King Darius came to power and found the original decree written by King Cyrus. This reinstated the authority for the restoration of the Temple, and the work should have resumed immediately (see Ezra 4:24). Instead, the captives had become comfortable with the situation and were spiritually lethargic. They were preoccupied with building their own homes and found excuses for neglecting the house of the Lord by claiming the timing wasn't right.

God called His "prophet" (Heb. *nabiy'*, naw-BEE) to urge the people to complete the temple. The phrase "thus speaketh the LORD of hosts" makes it clear that the words the prophet spoke were not merely his but God's. A similar phrase, "saith the LORD," is repeated throughout the book of Haggai (1:7, 13; 2:4, 6–9, 11, 14, 23) and points to Haggai as an instrument through whom God speaks.

Haggai addresses God's concerns to Zerubbabel, the governor of Jerusalem, and Josedech, the high priest. As "governor" (Heb. *pechah*, peh-KHAW), Zerubbabel was the captain over the returning remnant of Judah. He is referred to as being the son of Shealtiel who was a descendant of the House of David. Thus, a descendant of David was still "on the throne" or in leadership of Judah. Clearly Zerubbabel was not a king, but his lineage was important to the heritage of the people. In

this same verse, Joshua, the son of Josedech, was the high priest. This also follows a line of succession. Joshua was the great-grandson of the high priest Hilkiah. It was Hilkiah who found the Book of the Law in the temple during the renovations ordered by King Josiah (refer to lesson 5—March 30). Hilkiah's son, Seraiah, also served as high priest. Hilkiah's son likely served after captivity, but before deportation. Josedech was the son of Seraiah and the father of the high priest Joshua. Josedech was probably a captive and never served in the temple. In this text, Josedech is honored as the father of Joshua who served as high priest immediately following the exile.

Zerubbabel and Joshua were the highest ranking officials in the repopulated Jerusalem and represented both governmental and religious leadership. It was fitting that the word of rebuke given by God to Haggai be directed to the people who could make a difference.

**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.**

Haggai's first words on God's behalf attacked their excuses for not completing the building project. God begins by addressing the people as "this people" rather than "my people." The word for "people" (Heb. 'am, am) refers to a national identity of related kinsmen. God's condemnation was delivered to the leadership but encompassed each member of the family of Abraham. Since they had neglected His service, the returning captives were met with the accusatory and reproachful tone of "this people," showing their estrangement from God.

The excuse the people most often used to explain their neglect of God's work was that the "time" had not come. In other words, the proper time for building the temple had not arrived. The leaders claimed that the interruption in the work caused by their enemies proved that it was not yet the "proper time" to rebuild the temple. Their real motive, however, was self-centered. They did not want the trouble, expense, and danger from enemies. Politically, they were without excuse since King Darius was sympathetic to their cause. Haggai began with what the people "say" (Heb. 'amar, aw-MAR). By indicating what the people said, Haggai presented not just the words but also the thoughts behind them. Not only were the people giving an excuse, but they believed it! Their excuse had become their way of life, and they had become comfortable with it.

**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?**

The "LORD" (Heb. Yehovah, yeh-ho-VAW) is God's covenant title. It implies God's consistent and unchanging faithfulness in keeping His promises to His people. His faithfulness was in direct response to the unfaithfulness of the people He had delivered. In response to their complaint regarding time, God asked how it seemed to be a good time for them to build their own houses and to dwell there at ease.

God's words are "O ye," or literally, "you, you." The repetition of the pronoun shows the shameful contrast between their concern for themselves and their unconcern for God (see 1 Samuel 25:24 and Zechariah 7:5 for similar uses of repetition). The word "cieled" is from the Hebrew caphan (saw-FAN) and means "paneled" or "covered." It refers to the walls and ceilings of the people's homes, which were not only comfortably furnished but luxurious. This was in sad contrast to God's house, which was not merely unadorned; its walls were not raised above the foundations.

**1:7 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.**

"Consider your ways" translates two Hebrew words. The first, siym (seem), means "to set, put, or establish." The second, lebab (lay-BAWB), means "heart" and therefore implies "conscience or

mind." The phrase is literally, "Set your heart" or "Give careful consideration." The implication is to consider both what they had done and what they had allowed. The "mountain" is probably a reference to the mountains around Israel where trees were plentiful. Though not to the exclusion of other materials such as stones, wood was the primary material necessity in building the Temple.

God declared, "I will take pleasure" and "I will be glorified" in the newly built temple. "Pleasure," which derives from the Hebrew ratsah (raw-TSAW), denotes "delight in" or "to be pleased with." Ratsah frequently describes God's pleasure with His servants. "Glorified" is from kabad (kaw-BADE), meaning "to be honored or renowned." God is saying that He would be favorable to supplicants in the temple and receive the honor due to Him, which had been withheld by neglecting the temple that represented His presence.

**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.**

The Hebrew infinitive here expresses continued looking and expectation. The people hoped to increase their own possessions while neglecting the temple. As they sought to prosper in their homes and through the agriculture of the land where they settled, they kept finding themselves in the position of thinking they had enough but finding it was too little. Even if their idea was only to make ends meet, God reminds them in this verse that whatever they got for their toil was never enough.

Furthermore, God brings to their minds the fact that "when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it." In case they thought they were working hard but just not making enough or that someone was cheating them in their business dealings, God lets them know that He alone was responsible for their lack. It was God who scattered even the little crop the people harvested and stored in their barns. God caused their crops to perish with His breath, probably a reference to the wind and heat. The result was scattered and blighted wheat. Why did God deal so harshly with His people? Because His house was in ruin while the people rushed to pursue their own selfish interests. This is a classic sign of being not blessed; they would not prosper as long as they neglected God and the temple that had been erected in His name.

Verse 10 says that the sky (heaven) is "stayed" or literally "stays itself." Here sky is personified, implying that even inanimate nature, as represented by heaven and earth, obeys God's will and withholds its goods from disobedient people. God identifies Himself as the invisible first cause and declares it to be His doing. God "calls for" famine, drought, and poverty as instruments of His wrath. The Hebrew word for "drought," choreb (KHO-reb), sounds like chareb (khaw-RABE), which means "waste," and describes God's house (vv. 4, 9), implying the correspondence between the sin and its punishment. The people had let God's house "be waste," and He, in turn, sent a drought on all that was theirs: the crops, the cattle, and the people. The phrase "labour of the hands" refers to the fruit of lands, gardens, and vineyards obtained by the labor of workers' hands.

**1:12 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD.**

Zerubbabel the political leader and Joshua the high priest gathered all of those who returned from the exile. Their response was not only to listen to Haggai as he voiced God's complaint, but to obey God's call to complete their divinely appointed task. "Obeyed" is translated from the Hebrew word shama' (shaw-MAH), which literally means "to hear" and implies "to give undivided attention." The people heard the message and responded with heartfelt obedience, even though the work on the



Temple had not yet begun. They responded to the “LORD” (Heb. Yehovah, yeh-ho-VAW) their “God” (Heb. elohiym, el-o-HEEM). These terms define God as the self-existent and supreme Ruler. In essence, they were accepting not only the words but the authority of God in their lives. They were submitting to God’s will, repenting of their neglect, and purposing in their hearts to be obedient.

The Hebrew word *dabar* (daw-BAW) means “the words,” and in this case refers to the word of the Lord as presented by Haggai. The “word of the Lord” is the essential content of God’s revelation through His prophets or messengers. As a result, the people “did fear” (Heb. *yare’*, yaw-RAY). This doesn’t mean they operated out of terror. Instead, they began to reverence God with the honor and respect due His name.

**13 Then spake Haggai the LORD’s messenger in the LORD’s message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD.**

The Lord’s “messenger” (Heb. *mal’ak*, mal-AWK) depicts an ambassador who carries a message, performs some specific commission, or serves as a representative of the one who sent him. In this case, Haggai was the commissioned spokesperson to deliver God’s message, which was four simple, but profound words: “I am with you.” It is a promise of God’s ever-present empowerment to all those He commissions to service. As the people entered into the service of the Lord by being obedient to God’s command to rebuild the temple and to establish it as the center of worship and national life, God would be with them.

The people’s attitude had changed, and even before they set to work, God’s tone changed from reproving to tenderness. He immediately forgot their past unfaithfulness and assured them that their obedience led to blessing.

**14 And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God.**

The rebuilt Temple at Jerusalem is often referred to as Zerubbabel’s temple. This could be because of the deep personal interest he took in the project or the fact that he oversaw the work as the governor of Judah. In any event, the Scriptures say that the “Lord stirred up the spirit” in Zerubbabel and Joshua. This means that God blessed them with enthusiasm and perseverance to complete the good work, even though they had been slothful in not rallying the people to the work.

As a result, the people eagerly “came and did work,” collecting the wood, stones, and other materials necessary for building. The recorded time of this turnaround was the 24th day of the sixth month during the second year of Darius’s reign. Within 23 days from the start of Haggai’s prophecy, the people and their leaders had harkened to the prophet and turned their hearts and efforts to properly serve and honor God.

# Daily Bible Readings

## **Monday**

Psalm 84:1-4

## **Tuesday**

Haggai 1:1-11

## **Wednesday**

Haggai 1:12-15

## **Thursday**

Ezra 3:8-13

## **Friday**

Ezra 4:1-4

## **Saturday**

Ezra 5:1-5

## **Sunday**

Ezra 5:6-17