

Title: “Haggai Theme: Our God Restores” (What are my True Priorities?)

Text: Haggai 1:1-15

Date: Jan 17, 2021 at FBCW

INTRO.

What is the background of the book of Haggai?

Through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses → God had established a special covenant with His chosen people. These people were called the nation of Israel (or Israelites, Hebrews, or Jews).

God gave these Israelites 10 commandments, called his holy law. He told them 1) if you follow these commands, you will be blessed. But if 2) you disregard these commands, you will suffer.

No other gods...Make no idols...Don't take the Lord's name in vain...Remember the Sabbath...Honor your parents...Do not murder...Do not commit adultery...Do not steal...Do not lie...Do not covet.

If you honor these commands...you will dwell in the land and be blessed.

If you reject these commands...you will suffer.

By and large, the story of the Old Testament is the story of the nation of Israel...unable to consistently keep these ten commandments...

- Time and time again: the Israelites adopted strange gods, they made idols, they intermarried among unbelievers, and they didn't keep the Sabbath.

Though Israel failed, amazingly, God never stopped loving them and pursuing them.

- Though Israel broke the covenant, God would never break the covenant of his love and faithfulness to the nation.

Yet by the time we get to Haggai, we see: YES, God is a God of total love...but He is also a God of total truth.

- God is holy, and God must honor His Word.
- Yes, there would be consequences for breaking his commandments.

FACT. Reasonable parents know this. If you love your children...you discipline your children.

- Undisciplined children become unrestrained, unhinged children.
- Because you love them and desire what's best for them – you discipline them.
- You never discipline your children to push them away...
 - You discipline them to push the bad behavior away, and to call their hearts back to you!

This was God's pattern in the Old Testament. God would raise up preachers, called prophets, to call the people back to Himself. → The prophets preached, “*Thus says the Lord...*”

- *Repent and return to the Lord.*
- *Or ignore God's warning...and suffer the judgment of the Lord.*

God would even be this specific: *if you don't listen to me...I will allow other nations that I have protected you from, to rise up, and to come and destroy you.*

This was a vicious cycle in the Old Testament.

- The people would stray...and God would warn them through the prophets.
- Repent and return...or keep sinning and suffer.

And this is the historical backdrop of the book of Haggai.

The Israelites had adopted the pagan gods (the idols) of the nations around them. They ignored God's warning.

God allowed the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar to rise up, to defeat Israel, and to take the Jews as their prisoners. For about 70 years the Israelites were held captive in Babylon.

But yet – God never stopped loving Israel. When God knew He had the Israelites' attention...God allowed the Persians, under King Cyrus, to rise up and defeat the Babylonians.

Though the Persians weren't godly people...they were sympathetic to the Israelite cause. They let the Israelites go free. The Persians allowed Israel to return to their homeland (Jerusalem), and to restore their nation and to restore worship in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

So here we are at the time of Haggai. When the people initially returned to the land, they were successful at laying the foundation of the rebuilt Temple. Things started off quite well!

- But after the foundation was laid, they got off track. Ezra 3-4 tells us this story.
- Opposition from neighboring nations caused a delay in Temple construction, which put the rebuilding of the Temple on hold for many years.

Haggai is addressing this group of Jews who have returned to Jerusalem – specifically the group who has stopped work on rebuilding the Temple.

- Scholars estimate that they have been back “home in Jerusalem” for about twenty years. But no work on the Temple has occurred in the last 14-16 years.

Haggai's message is simple: come back to the Lord...realign your priorities with God!

- *You've focused all your energy on your own houses...while God's house remains in ruin.*
- *Put your energy into God's House...and God will take care of everything else.*

When you put God first, He restores you! When God isn't in His rightful place in your heart...you always end up regretting it.

KEY. When you put God first, you cannot lose. When God is not first, you will not win!

First, Haggai reminds us that we need to take a serious look at our habits and priorities (vv 1-6).

V1. Haggai's message is to first approach the leaders: Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua the high priest.

V2. *“Thus says the Lord of hosts...”*

- How we live is personal with God. “Who cares how we live?” → God does!

V2. *The people say it's not time to rebuild the house of the Lord? What?*

- If we don't obey God today, then, when will we?

V4. Is it right that we live in our fancy houses, while God's house lays in ruins?

V5 & V7, God says this two times: *“Think carefully about your ways...”*

V6. Haggai is pointing out the irony: without putting God first, we are never content.

V8. God is telling them: take the same effort that has been for yourselves...and now build me a proper house!

LESSON. Great revivals can happen when leaders see and feel the need.

- Haggai went to Zerubbabel and Joshua first – the political and spiritual leaders.

Question: instead of constant negativity, what if we asked God to do a great work in the heart of Joe Biden? Kamala Harris? Nancy Pelosi?

- A work that the whole nation was able to see?
- Is it possible? Can God do it? Are we known as people who are cynical or prayerful?

Instead of praying for a work that the nation could see – let's make it more personal than this.

- What if God did a work in Dad/Mom that the whole family was able to see?
- What if God did a work in a Teenager that every classmate was able to see?
- What if God did a work in a businessperson that the whole company was able to see?

FACT. Many people want to be leaders...but not enough leaders want to be led by God!

Great revivals can happen when leaders become alert/sensitive to the things of God!

- Are you a leader? Can we see God obviously transforming you?
- Can we really even honestly call you a leader if you are already finished growing?

LESSON. Haggai says repeatedly, *“God is the one who speaks this...”* *“The Lord of hosts.”*

- It means: the leader of all armies...there is a vast/superior army...God is the leader.
- God is the mighty, authoritative leader of heaven's great army.

Serious question: if now (Jan. 2021) is not the proper time to get right with God, then when is?

You may be thinking, “no, I can’t rebuild my life right now” – why not?

- 2 Cor 6:2, *Today is the day of salvation.*
- A wise man told me → the devil’s favorite word → tomorrow.
- When it comes to sin: let us pause!
- When it comes to obedience: let us obey now! No hesitation (Gen 19:16, *Lot...*)
- 1 Thess 5:22, *Flee the appearance of evil.*

Haggai 1:4 is a great opportunity to look in our hearts → are we giving the bulk of our resources to material pleasures instead of eternal priorities?

- How many Sundays in a year am I devotedly engaged with Christ, church, family?
- How many mornings do I prioritize – first thing – personal time with the Lord?
- How many paychecks do I get – and the first thing that comes is an offering to God?
- How many evenings do we sit on our phones/TVs, instead of asking our loved ones serious questions about the dreams God may be putting in our hearts?
- How many conversations with our kids are about: grades, friends, sports VS what do you think God is saying to you about your life?
- How many conversations with your spouse go like this – can you please tell me one key thing I can do to encourage your walk with the Lord?
- How many of us say to our neighbors and co-workers – not how’s the weather, and who won or lost the game, or about politics – but how might I pray for you? Stand with you? Serve you and your family for the Lord?

FACT. All of us are investing in something! What are our true priorities?

- Money...time...talents...influence. Going *to* what? Going *for* what?

“Think carefully about your ways” → When is the last time you sat down, or got on your knees, and you thought long, hard, carefully about your life? Patterns? Habits? Spiritual condition?

Second, Haggai provides a very clear warning: if my priorities don’t flow from God’s Word, I will never get ahead, and I will constantly struggle (vv 10-11).

Haggai’s words: God withheld rain...vegetation...growth...God allowed drought.

FACT. I can’t make it rain. I can’t buy happiness! I can’t force good health. I can’t materially create the illusion of a happy family – these are all grace gifts from the Lord!

Third, the key to Christianity is obedience (vv 12-15). Notice what Haggai reports: All the people...obeyed God...they respected God...they came and worked on the house.

- God said, “*I am with you.*” (v 13).

Q: What is obedience?

A: It is discovering and doing the will of God; and trusting the results to Him.

CONCL. Haggai asked the Jews to ponder: how could they enjoy nice homes while God's House lies in ruins?

Today's Big Idea. Believers must consider: are we investing our lives in material pleasures instead of the things that impact eternity?

Am I investing my life in a God who restores? With Christ on the throne of my heart, I cannot lose.

Or am I investing my life in the world, that always takes? If I chase the world, I cannot win.