

Let the Temple Glorify God
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As I said earlier, quite a bit of the staff has been traveling this past week. I believe Larry is in Oregon visiting sons and daughters there, and Jim is in North Carolina, and Ashley—I don't know where he is, but I know he's at a wedding, and I know it's not in Alaska. So he's outside, too. That leaves...that left Rick—the new guy, and Jake and I holding down the building, so we had to do the work this weekend, this last week. And I worked the lower Kenai at the mouth with Thomas. And we got ourselves thirty-five fish down there. He caught one more than me. Anyway...and Jake, he worked a little bit further up the river, but he was in a boat and he caught, with some other families, like two hundred and thirty-three salmon! So he cleaned up. We did our work this last week.

But this week we're gonna get back into the study of the Minor Prophets. Now, I was gonna have you turn to Haggai chapter three if you would, which is gonna be a challenge because there is no Haggai chapter three. There's only two chapters in this whole book, and that's why it's called a Minor Prophet. I listed the other prophets that are near them. Malachi, if you recognize it, is the last book of the Old Testament. So what we're coming into here is the end times of the Old Testament. And we're gonna do a little bit of background about Haggai, because it's not a familiar book. But as you get into it it's an exciting book—a lot of really neat information in Haggai.

I was tellin' somebody that I was preaching on Haggai this week, and they said "What are you gonna preach about?" I said, "Aha! You have no clue, either!" Haggai is such a obscure... but when you...but when we get done, hopefully you will see that there's just a lot of rich things in Haggai.

To set this book up you need to know a chronology of the nation of Israel, because Haggai is talking about the nation of Israel and very intricately about the temple. So we're gonna go through this a little bit. I do a Sunday school class every Sunday that I'm not up here (or fishing) upstairs, second hour. And I always tell the Sunday school class that it's for this study it's best to start reading like in Matthew. But for the study of Haggai you're best to start reading in Genesis and then work your way through, because it's just...to catch the real full flavor of Haggai you've gotta understand the richness that God has put in Genesis through Haggai...actually through Malachi if you get right down to it. But we'll start out with just the kingdom, because this very much involves the kingdom.

And if you know your history, the kingdom of Israel after the time of the Judges started with Saul. And then David was the leader-king who really got things going. He was a warrior-king who did a lot of conquering around him and got the nation established with its riches, and close to its high time. And because David was so powerful in his leading and God was with him, of course, his son Solomon came across and that was why it was called the golden time. And very well named golden time, because Solomon...he collected so much gold and silver. They said silver was of little value in the streets because there was so much gold.

And it was during the reign of Solomon that God had His temple built. He was dwelling with the Israelites in the Tabernacle, that big tent with camel...no, cows'...see cow's hide hair over the top, and all the various layers of waterproof skins dyed red, and all those things you read about in Leviticus and Deuteronomy where they're setting this temple up. And God wanted to dwell amongst His people. And He dwelt amongst His people in a tent because they were mobile. But then once David settled down in the land, He said 'I want to dwell among you in a permanent building. I want to dwell amongst you in a temple.'

So the temple became very, very important to the Israelites in their worship of God, because that's where the Holy of Holies were. That's where God's seat was. That's where the High Priest met with God, and where you did your sacrifices and you came clean every year with God and restarted your worship again, fresh and clean. It was Solomon that built that temple. And that temple...we don't have any pictures of it. Digital cameras weren't working back then. Nor has any drawings existed. But it was...it was fantastic. It was just covered in gold—covered in hammered gold and just a beautiful place. And they worshipped there for about forty years; and then...well actually, they did longer than that.

But what happened after Solomon is the kingdom got divided with his sons. And a new guy went north with a bunch—ten tribes, and one of Solomon's sons stayed in Judah and Benjamin, with two tribes there. And the nation was divided, and from that point on started to go downhill.

God sent prophet after prophet both to the northern kingdoms and to the southern kingdoms trying to bring them back to Him. They didn't come back to God at that time. And during that time of those prophets, the prophets said, 'You know, God said if you worship Him you'll stay in the land, and He will always abide with you. But if you do what you're doing now, God's gonna kick you out of the land.' And He told them that over, and over, and over, and over, and over again. And the people didn't change their hearts. And eventually they were kicked out of the land.

It was told to them that they would be out for seventy years. Interesting sideline on these seventy years—it's just so cool that I have to stick it in here, even though it doesn't really have anything to do with Haggai. They were in the year for 490 years, and God had told them that every year they were in the land they were supposed to have...for every seven years they were supposed to have a jubilee where the land just stays fallow. Just 'I'll bless you year six; year seven—leave it fallow. Let the land recuperate.' Well, they were more business-oriented than they were God-oriented, and they worked their way through those seven years. And they didn't give the land its Sabbath rest.

Well, you go seven years times 490—actually, you'd have to divide that—you come with seventy years of fallow time that they missed. And God said, 'I get what I want. I'm getting my seventy years. And the land is going to rest for seventy years. You're going into captivity.' And sure enough, they did. They got carried away to...the northern tribes got carried away one way, and the southern tribes got carried away another way. They end up in Babylon.

Again, many of you have read this, and understand this history. David is in...not David—Daniel—is in Babylon with them, prophesying, doing his thing there. Interesting time. During the divided kingdom you have a prophet, Isaiah, speaking of what's going to happen during the end of that captivity. He prophesied, and it's...the calendars are kinda messed up, 'cause they did 360-day years, so it's kinda hard to get it exact; but around 150-175 years before the events actually happened, Isaiah said exactly what was going to happen, about them coming back to the land and rebuilding the temple. And that return and restoration is covered in part by Haggai. So now we're up to speed, ok?

We had a temple that was destroyed, that was totally wiped out, and the land stayed fallow for 70 years. And the prophecy was that they would return to the land and that the temple would get rebuilt. Ok? So now we're going to read about how that came about.

Oh yeah...kings of Persia—it helps to know these guys. And as you read your Bible and you study your history, I need to explain that they changed their names because unlike our names, their names meant something. Like the second guy, that Artaxerxes—means 'ruler of truth.' Ok. So you could have a name—the guy's name might have been 'George', but they called him 'Artaxerxes' because he was the 'ruler of truth'. So you'll see about four or five Artaxerxes, and you're going 'wait a minute...which one is this?' If you look in the history books they give him a different name. But in the Bible he is called Artaxerxes there.

But the first guy, Cyrus, he was the one that Isaiah, in chapter 44-44 (and you really should read this when you get home—this is so neat)...up to 150 years before this guy was born he was mentioned by name. God said, 'Cyrus, you are going...even though you don't know Me,' the guy was a heathen, worshipped 'Mordoc', ok, he didn't worship God. But God says, 'Even though you don't know Me, I'm gonna use you, Cyrus.' Ok? He says, 'I'm gonna dry up the rivers in front of you and you're gonna conquer, and you are going to send My people back to their land, and you're going to lay the foundations of My temple.'

Well interestingly enough, when Cyrus was conquering across the desert there, he gets up to Babylon; and you got the Tigris River there. Now I don't know, and I don't think anybody today knows, if he read this before or after. But they got this great idea—instead of havin' to fight their way across the Tigris River, they rerouted the waters and dropped the water level and walked across with his armies. He coulda got that from Isaiah; or later, when he's reading in Isaiah, he's going 'Oh, I did that!' And then he sees his name—Cyrus—and then it says 'You're going to send My people back and establish My temple.' And he goes 'I better do that.' Ok. So Cyrus does this. He sends the Jews back to the land and he gives them permission to build the temple.

Cyrus went off to fight; I think it was up in Crete. He didn't do so well that time. He died. So his son took over, and his son didn't do so well, either. He got bumped off. Then this Artaxerxes, this 'ruler of truth', wasn't...shouldn't have been in the line, but he comes in. And while they're building, we'll read about this guy. Zerubbabel is building. And while he's building, all the goin', 'We don't like this. We remember seventy years ago when Israel was here. They're not good people. I mean, they destroy the nations around them. Ok? 'Cause they got God on their side. And we don't want them to have a temple here.'

So they had a whole bunch of adversaries sayin', 'Ah, we should do this.' And they wrote to Artaxerxes, saying, 'No, we shouldn't let these guys rebuild. Go look in your archives and see that this nation is always been a strong nation. You don't want them to be a strong nation here.'

So Artaxerxes, the 'ruler of truth'—which was a false ruler; they call him pseudo-Artaxerxes in the history books—he stopped the building. He says to these adversaries around Jerusalem, 'Ok, tell 'em to stop building. Tell 'em I said so.' Ruler of the world, ok, so he can say that. 'Tell 'em I said stop building.' So they stopped building the temple. And for sixteen years the temple grounds were not worked on. God had told 'em, 'Go build.' Cyrus had told 'em, 'Go build', through God. And now comes this Artaxerxes and says, 'Stop building,' and they stop building.

Well, that didn't sit well with God. Because you can have the ruler of the world tell you to do something, but if you have the Ruler of the universe that said, 'Go ahead and do it,' you should listen to the Ruler of the universe, not the ruler of the world. Ok? So God speaks through Haggai and gets them working again. And we're gonna...I'm gonna...we're gonna do some reading here. Haggai chapter 1, and it looks like I'm gonna read the whole chapter. This is only fifteen verses, but here we go. We'll get to Darius later.

Well, actually, let me do this now. Artaxerxes...I said he was a false ruler. Darius was the one that was truly in line. And as kings can sometimes do, he put himself in line. So Artaxerxes is out, Darius is in. And now this...you'll see that we're in the time of Darius at the time of this reading. So Haggai 1:1...

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

"Thus says the LORD of hosts: This people says the time has not come, even the time for the house of the LORD to be rebuilt."

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

"Is it time for you, yourselves, to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies desolate? Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. You have so much, but harvest little. You eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied. You drink, but there is not enough to become drunk. You put on clothing, but no one is warm enough. And he who earns, earns to put into a purse with holes.

Thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. Go up on the mountains; bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified, says the LORD. You look for much, but behold, it comes to little. When you bring it home I blow it away. Why? declares the LORD of hosts. Because My house, which lies desolate, while each of you runs to his own house. Therefore because of you the sky has withheld its dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands."

Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, 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 showed reverence for the LORD. Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke by the commission of the LORD to the people saying,

"I am with you, declares the LORD."

So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. And they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

Let's remember what we have here. We have a nation—it's a small nation, only about 40,000-50,000 people came back from Babylon. So it's really not a nation at all...it's a big town, a big city; and they're surrounded by people who have been living in that land for 70 years, not wanting them to come back. They have adversaries on all sides. And at this time, when Haggai is speaking, they still have the decree of Artaxerxes that says, 'Do not build.'

And along comes Haggai and says, 'Build!' And he encourages the builders; he encourages the builders in Haggai 2:4, because now they're working. He says

"Now take courage, Zerubbabel, declares the LORD. Take courage also, Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. And all you people of the land, take courage, declares the LORD. And work, declares the LORD, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts."

These people stood up after sixteen years of following...of being scared, really, of going to do the work that God had told them to do. They stood up and went to work. And now Haggai is telling them to be...to take courage. It's one thing to have somebody tell you to take courage. I like it when somebody tells me *why* I can take courage, ok? I'm faced with some things, sometimes, and it's nice to know who's behind it, who's got your back, and why you should be able to take courage.

And there's some clues that Haggai gives us throughout his book. And for those of you who like to count, count how many times you see 'the LORD of hosts' in those two chapters. Now, you're not going to do that quick; I'll do that for you...I already did—fourteen times! Fourteen times Haggai, when he refers to Jehovah, he refers to Him as 'the LORD of hosts.' Now, think what that would mean to the people who are faced with adversaries all around. Ok? You've got people on all sides of you, literally 360 degrees around you, who do not want you to be there, and who have the authority of Artaxerxes to say, 'Do not build.' And now you have a prophet, Haggai, come along and say, 'No. Build!' 'cause that's what God wants. And he says, 'Take courage!' but he always...not always, but often, fourteen different times...refers to God as 'the LORD of hosts.'

That's a neat name when you think about it, because Artaxerxes may have had millions in his army, but he's not the LORD of hosts. Ok? This name tells people that my God has so much at His fingertips. He has the host of heaven at His fingertips. And if I'm gonna be encouraged, if I can go build, and I have that kind of God behind me, there is reason to be encouraged. Because I'm working for not some king or some emperor, or whatever they called him back there...Artaxerxes in Babylon. I'm working for the LORD of hosts. So in the face of the enemies and the adversaries around them, they went to work.

And the adversaries...now you can get this from...you can read this in Zachariah, you read this in Ezra...the adversaries around them said, 'Now this is no good. We have a king's decree says you can't work.' So they sent off to Artaxerxes a letter saying, 'Hey, these people are working! And they were told that they shouldn't be working.' Actually, they sent it off to Artaxerxes...but Artaxerxes was dead.

So Darius gets this letter. Darius reads this, and Darius goes, 'Well, let me check the archives.' So he checks the archives, kinda skips over Artaxerxes 'cause he was kinda an imposter, and goes right back to Cyrus. And Cyrus said to go ahead and build! So Darius now says, 'Sounds like a great idea!' And you know what he told the adversaries around the area? He said, 'Not only do you not stop them from building—give 'em money, don't tax 'em, help 'em out, get 'em wood...' It's like that backfired on those guys. Ok?

God wanted His temple built. He wanted to dwell amongst His people once more.

We get another clue for...for why we're building this temple. In Haggai 1:8 we read this; but as we were reading in all this you may have missed this. But God says to them...I'll start in verse 7, says

"Consider your ways. Go up on the mountains; bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified, says the LORD."

The temple has more than one purpose, of course. But from God's perspective it was a purpose of "...that I may be glorified. I wanna dwell among the nations with you, and I'm gonna do that in a temple. You build Me a temple that I may be glorified." And as you read on, the temple that they built didn't come anywhere near Solomon's temple. In fact, the older guys, the guys that had lived through that 70 years of captivity, that saw Solomon's temple before it was destroyed...when they saw this new foundation and this new temple they were in tears—because it didn't come close to what God had before as a house here on earth. But God says, 'I'm going to be glorified in that temple.'

Now later, Herod...much later, just in time for Jesus' arrival (what a coincidence!)...just in time for Jesus' arrival Herod says let's rebuild this thing. And he builds it up into a magnificent temple, much more than it was during the time of Zerubbabel. But God said, 'I want this place so I may be glorified.' Ok? He has a purpose for that temple to be there.

And all this is good stuff. And it goes on. If you go on to reading, they talk about some...now we're not gonna read the second chapter. I'll leave that for you—it's only twenty-three verses. But they talk about the holiness and cleanness, and unclean; and these people weren't clean. Just working on a temple doesn't make you clean. It's here that you need to be clean, inside.

And then He gives them a promise. He says, 'You know, this temple may not be as good as Solomon's, but the day is coming, the future—I'm going to build the temple. And when I build it all the wealth of the nations are gonna come in, and it's gonna be a temple. It's gonna be amazing.' So they've got something to look forward to.

So what are the applications? Hopefully you've seen some in here, but I'm going to point some things out. Right now, where is the temple? It was destroyed; Herod's temple that he built lasted four or five years...no, actually, he got to build it just about the time before Jesus. It only lasted 70 years. And about 70 AD the Romans came in. And as Jesus said, not one stone was left upon another. They tore it down. They burned it.

And actually, I don't know if some of you remember that saying where Jesus said, 'See this temple? It's gonna come a day when not one stone is left upon another.' Well, remember I said that they inlay these things with gold? Well, that's what they did. They inlay these things with gold. And when you burn a temple—there were timbers in there, too—and when you burn the thing the gold melts and gets underneath those blocks. We're talking huge blocks. So you got this molten gold going underneath the blocks. And when you're a Roman soldier and you're after...you're pillaging...you wanna get that gold. You found out it went underneath the blocks. So you tear down the blocks so you can get that gold. *Not one stone was left upon another.* Jesus knew what He was talkin' about. Every stone was torn down. They went after that gold.

So this magnificent temple of Herod's is gone...70 AD it's gone. No more worship there at the temple. And God is not dwelling amongst the Jews in Jerusalem in that temple anymore. So where does He dwell? Paul tells us. He says, 'Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you.' You are the temple. You are where God dwells. He chooses to dwell amongst the nations—in you. He chooses to dwell amongst your neighborhood—in you. He chooses to dwell amongst your coworkers—in you. He chooses to dwell within your family—in you. That's where God has put His temple. You are the temple of God.

Begs the question—consider your ways. Is the temple lying desolate? Is it being unbuilt? Is it being uncared-for for sixteen years? Or are you diligently working on that temple of God?

What does that mean? Well, it can mean all kinds of things. For starters, is it a place that...what was the purpose of God's temple? To glorify Him. Does the temple of God bring God glory in your community? Does the temple of God...is it lying desolate while you live in paneled houses, Haggai would ask. Or is it a place that brings God glory amongst your coworkers? Is the temple of God, where He dwells by His Spirit, a place that brings God glory in your school? Is it a place that brings God glory in your family? That was the purpose of the temple, and Haggai made that very clear. And he said, "Consider your ways," 'cause when he mentioned to the people, "the house of God lays desolate while you live in paneled houses," you know where you get paneling in Jerusalem? You gotta go up to Jordan, ok? You gotta go up...actually you gotta go up to Lebanon to get your paneling. So what he's saying is 'For sixteen years you've been taking care of yourself. You've been going up to Lebanon. You've been getting the paneling. You've been working on things, but you've not been working on My dwelling. Consider your ways. I want you to work on My dwelling.'

Is there a New Testament passage that corresponds? I think there is. If we have a tendency to look at things around us, and chasing after things, Jesus here is being quoted when he says, "*Do not be anxious, then, saying 'What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or with what shall we clothe ourselves?'*" Or I might add in 'With what shall we panel our houses?' "*For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.*" [Matthew 6:32-33] Just like in the days of Haggai.

When Haggai came up to the people and said, 'The house of God is lying desolate...' the foundation had been started sixteen years ago. But it hasn't been built on in sixteen years. 'I don't have a place where I can dwell and be glorified. Consider your ways.' 'Let's get...let's get on the stick!' They didn't say that. He said, 'Let's get building. Consider your ways and let's build Me a place where I can be glorified.'

Later on in the book...you'll see through Haggai, he talks...he give the day, the actual day things happen. And he says, 'Look at this day. From this day, the day you decide to building again, God is going to start blessing. You watch...you watch your crops. You watch your fields. You watch your olive trees. You watch your vines. From this day forward, blessings will come,' is what Haggai was telling the people from God.

I see that same thing here. We seek His kingdom and His righteousness first, and all those other things will be added unto you. God'll take care of the little things like house, cars, clothes, ok? We sometimes think those are big things; but our priorities, like in the days of Haggai, need to be aligned correctly. That 'consider your ways'... I used to hear my dad say "Let us reason together." And he would say, "Consider your ways." I think he got that from here.

We need to consider our ways. Are we putting God first in the temple that He's given us, so that we bring Him glory, and let these other things be taken care of by Him? That was the message of Haggai in those days, and it's a good message. It's a good message that we need to hear today.

I found myself, as I was going through this throughout my week, saying to myself, "Consider your ways." Ok? I'd be heading a direction, I'd go, "Consider your ways," and I'd turn around in a different direction. 'Cause we need to do that, because if our temple is not bringing glory to God we need to consider our ways, as Haggai has said.

Written in 520 BC, very current stuff for us today. And I would encourage you as you, this afternoon hopefully, read the second part of Haggai—and it's backed up by Zachariah, and it's backed up by Ezra, so there's some really good reading there—and I pray that we would be able to consider our ways.

I want you to stand with me now. We'll pray.

Our dear Lord and heavenly Father,

I pray that we would be challenged by the prophet Haggai to put our priorities in order; to seek Your will, Your desires, first in our lives. Then all those other things that we so much want to chase after, that we know that the Gentiles chase after those things, Lord, but we know that we need first to look after Your righteousness and Your kingdom; and You'll add those things to us, Lord. But first of all, let us build for You a temple that is worthy of Your glory, a temple that can be a place where people can see that God dwells, and that You would be glorified in our bodies, Father.

I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.