

Repent and Rebuild For A Far Greater Glory Awaits! Hag. 2:9

This morning's message is from Haggai, one of the minor prophets. Before we get into this book, I'd like to quickly put up a couple of pictures of two places on our church grounds that motivate me. The first picture is a familiar plaque at the front entrance that says, "The Fishers of Men Windows, Dedicated on April 4, 1999 in Memory of Harlow Willard, Pastor from 1958 to 1983."



The second picture you may not have seen, is another plaque located outside on a shed, just beyond the northeastern corner of the sanctuary. It says, "On This Site in 1897 Nothing Happened." I'm sure whoever mounted this did so out of humor.



I want to keep those two pictures in mind during the message, and I will come back at the end to tie in why these two sites motivate me and why they should motivate you too!

Haggai: Background and Structure.

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Now turning to Haggai, here is the backdrop to this short, powerful prophecy. In 586 BC, Jerusalem was ransacked by the Babylonians and Solomon's glorious temple was completely destroyed. The Jews were taken into exile until the Persians, led by King Cyrus, ended the Babylonian Empire in 539 BC. Shortly afterward, King Cyrus issued a decree, allowing the Jews to return to their homeland to rebuild the temple. Around 50,000 Jews, called "the remnant," returned to Jerusalem and started the rebuilding project but only got as far as laying the foundation for the temple. As it were, opposition from the enemies of Judah discouraged the builders until they stopped the work. 15 years later, with the temple project in a perpetual standstill, Haggai steps into the scene and begins to prophesy against the apathetic and self-serving attitudes of God's people by giving messages to Zerubbabel, the *governor* of Judah (for they were still under foreign rule), and Joshua the high priest.

The book of Haggai contains four distinct messages, we'll go through them quickly in this order: first message, third message, second, and fourth message. The underlying theme in all four messages is the exhortation to repent and rebuild the temple, for a far greater glory beyond your imagination awaits!

Repent and Rebuild! (1:1-15)

If you have your Bibles, please turn to Haggai 1, verses 2-4 and skip down to verse 9.

2 This is what the Lord Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house.'" 3 Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: 4 "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" 9 "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the Lord Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. (New International Version, Haggai 1:2-4, 9)

Now let's take apart some key elements of Haggai's first message. Haggai challenged the apathetic, selfish attitude of the people with his pointed rhetorical question. He effectively strips away the justification of the people that the timing wasn't right, and he exposes the real problem, which was their pursuit of personal wealth and comfort. The word "paneled" in verse 4 is a reference to paneled

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interior walls, or walls lavishly decorated with expensive woodwork. The root word *spn* is found six times in the Old Testament, referring to the decorative beams enclosing the roof in Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 6:9), or the expensive cedar paneling of Solomon's palace (1 Kgs 7:3, 7; Jer. 22:14). The emphasis is clearly on the presentation of extravagant wealth (Taylor & E. Ray. Clendenen Section 1).

Staying in verse 4, I want us to notice Haggai's use of the word "house." There is no mistake that Haggai chooses the word "house" instead of temple to describe the Lord's house which is in ruins, alongside the words "paneled houses" of the people, a veiled allusion to Solomon's temple- do you see the parallel (Taylor & E. Ray. Clendenen Section 1)? In essence, Haggai is telling the people that their priorities are completely backwards. They are spending their time and resources building the wrong house! What was intended for God's house has been redirected to their own personal homes for their own personal comforts.

Further, in the people's attempts to live comfortably in their own homes, they were found miserable and wanting, we can see that in vs. 5-6. They planted but harvested little, they drank and were never filled, they put on clothes but were never warm, and they *"earned wages only to put them in a purse with holes in it."* (Hag. 1:6). Why? Because the Lord's house was in ruins while everyone was busy with their own house. When we run after our own desires and delay putting God first, we'll never really find exactly what we're looking for— in fact, we'll be left wanting.

So, Haggai's first message is to repent, make the Lord your first priority, and get up and rebuild His temple. His challenge is a complete restructuring of priorities, a change from being me-centered to becoming God-centered. When the people heard this word from Haggai, they listened, the work resumed, and God said, "I am with you." Here is something we can take from this last part: when we respond to God's call for repentance with a faith action¹, God's presence with us is immediate—for God desires a dwelling place with us, but He does not stop there.

Sinful Hearts Corrupt the Work, God Blesses the Obedient. (2:10-19)

Skipping past the second message in Haggai for a few minutes, let's move to the third message, found in chapter 2:10-19. Almost 3 months after the people resumed the work on the temple, disturbing things are happening. The people

¹ This is more than just feeling sorry for your sin but never actually doing anything about it- true repentance requires action.

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believed that they were made holy simply by their work on the temple. So Haggai went to the priests with a few questions in the form of a parable regarding clean and unclean things. We don't have enough time to walk through the OT theology of holiness, so just accept this for what it is².

To paraphrase, Haggai's first question was, can a holy item such as consecrated meat folded into a garment make something else holy when touched by the garment? The priests answered no. The second question was can anything holy become unclean when touched by an unclean person? They answered yes. Haggai then states that in the same way, these people have sin in their lives yet they think that simply their obedience in building the temple will make them holy, but in fact, their sin corrupts the work of the Lord. Well how many of us here have ever felt extra holy whenever we've led a Bible study, led worship, served communion, or served the church in some way?

Listen, the issue that Haggai is pointing out has to do with the poor spiritual condition of the people and its affect on their work and their offerings for the Lord. Read verse 2:14 *"So it is with this people and this nation in my sight... whatever they do and whatever they offer their is defiled."* Now, notice that God says "this people" and "this nation," rather than "my people" and "my nation." This is intentional. The implication is that even though they are indeed God's people obediently engaged in the holy task of rebuilding the temple, their hearts are so far removed from God that He can't even recognize them as His people! (Taylor & E. Ray. Clendenen Section 3). Sinful hearts corrupt the work done for God and, worse yet, a sinful heart separates itself from God. The underlying theme behind Haggai's message here is God's desire for genuine repentance on a spiritual level. Until now they have only worked in obedience to rebuild a physical temple, now God is calling them to rebuild their spiritual temple— remember this point I'll come back to it later.

The beauty in the rest of this section, verses 15-19, is that God is indeed going to bless them and fill their empty storehouses with everything they need *physically*. Until now, almost 3 months into the building project, they've been miserable and lacking, but all of that is about to change because God is lovingly drawing them back to Him. In the context of the story, this is a very deep message: sinful hearts corrupt the work done for God, yet God still pursues and blesses the obedient. Our God is gracious, He is the God of hope and a brighter future, and He is always pointing us to the greater things He has prepared for us, if we would only turn to Him and walk closely with Him!

² For a short overview on OT holiness please see my attached essay.

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A Far Greater Glory Awaits! (2:1-9)

Now we are ready to go back and survey Haggai's second message found in chapter 2:1-9. The time of this message is nearly two months after the people restarted the rebuilding project. In the first month or two of reconstruction the people became discouraged and the work on the temple stalls. Haggai doesn't waste any time exposing the reason for their discouragement, as we can see in vs. 3, *"Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?"* The problem is the people knew that their little temple project absolutely paled in comparison to Solomon's magnificent temple (Taylor & E. Ray. Clendenen Section 4). In fact, it was nothing compared to the previous temple. The feeling was, why bother with such a puny, unimpressive undertaking when the magnificent wonder of the previous temple once stood here as the landmark of Jerusalem? Judah would surely become the laughingstock of their neighbors!

Let me ask you- have you ever compared your work to someone else and decided to quit because you knew you couldn't measure up to them? Making comparisons at times can be a helpful learning experience but more often than not, it causes discouragement and feelings of inferiority. When we have been called to a certain task, we should never be afraid of someone else's work. In whatever God has called you to do, don't try to make comparisons. Remain faithful in your work and trust that God will use your unique contribution in amazing ways! Too often we expect that our work will start off with a bang, have the air of instant success, will provoke instant excitement and anticipation, and will be the next best thing, the envy of the town. It hardly ever works that way, a lot of the time we start off with a whimper, in fits and starts... things often seem wonky, awkward, and a bit off-kilter at first. Listen to what Zechariah 4:10 says, *"do not despise small beginnings."* Don't forget, God can take a measly five loaves of bread and some fish and turn it into a feast for thousands!!

That is basically what He promised the builders in Haggai- first he told them to be strong and do not fear, for I am with you— this was a familiar encouragement that was echoed to the Israelites throughout their history— it would have invoked memories of the patriarchs. Then He said in verse 6, *"I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, I will shake all the nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory."* That scene is echoed in Haggai's fourth message that we'll look in a minute. Now here comes the capstone of Haggai's entire prophecy, verse 9 the

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Lord says: *“The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house, and in this place I will grant peace.”* God is telling the builders to keep up the work, be strong, do not be afraid, because even though they don’t see it in their work now, what’s coming is a far greater glory than ever before! What’s coming is a move of God so strong that the whole earth will be shaken, and the Lord will cause His people to thrive. Finally, the calming peace of God’s presence will dwell with His people.

Conclusion: The Greater Temple. (2:20-23)

Now before we finish, let’s quickly look at how God’s temple has advanced in glory throughout the ages to fulfill Haggai’s prophecy. We need to do this to see how Haggai’s message is just as much for us today as it was for the people of Judah 2500 years ago. First I want to remind you that the temple spoken about in Haggai was finished forty plus years later and then destroyed in 70 AD after Jesus’ resurrection. Keep that in mind as we glance at Haggai’s fourth and final message.

Haggai’s final message is addressed to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah. The message foreshadows a cataclysmic event that indicates judgment on the nations similar to what was seen in the Exodus, with a final proclamation that Zerubbabel will be like a signet ring for the Lord. A signet ring is a sign of authority and divine approval (Taylor & E. Ray. Clendenen Section 5). Whoever has a signet ring from a king is an authoritative representative of the king who owned the signet ring, they are endowed with the same authority as the king wherever they go. So, it’s extraordinary that God would endow Zerubbabel with such divine authority. Who was Zerubbabel in history? He never became anything more than what he already was, a governor who helped lead the building of the second temple.

However, Zerubbabel was a descendant of King David. Who was it that came through Zerubbabel’s line? Jesus the Messiah! So, Haggai’s final message is messianic and eschatological in nature (or having to do with Jesus and the end times). It is a prophecy that I believe is tied to the overlying message of repentance, rebuilding the temple of the Lord, and the greater glory that awaits.

Now let’s see how God’s temple has advanced in greater glory. As I noted earlier, this second temple was destroyed in AD 70, not long after Jesus walked the earth. In John 2:13-22, Jesus went into this same temple and overturned the tables and drove out the money changers— the Jews there asked him *“what sign can you show us to prove your authority?”* (Jn. 2:18), and Jesus answered *“destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”* (Jn 2:19). Jesus was talking

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about His own body, which had become the very dwelling place, or the very temple of God on this earth. Please hear this: Jesus replaced the inferior temple of stone and wood with a far superior temple of divine flesh and blood. When Jesus was resurrected and left the earth He sent His Holy Spirit to be with us and what happened to God's temple on this earth? WE... You and I became the temples of the Holy Spirit (Arnold & Bryan Beyer 464). 1 Cor. 6:16 says *"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?"* And 1 Cor. 6:19-20 says *"Do you not know that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you... you are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."* A temple is simply a dwelling place where God can be with His people. Finally, In the future, God himself and the Lamb will be our temple (Rev. 21:22)(Arnold & Bryan Beyer 464)- for there will be no need for anymore external temples. What a magnificent picture!

So Haggai's message to us today is to repent, turn to Jesus, and rebuild your temple that belongs to the Lord. Do not fear, do not get distracted or intimidated by whatever is around you- draw near to me, for I am with you, I will bless you, a far greater glory beyond your imagination awaits you! That is the story of Haggai.

Now to end, I want to return to those two pictures I put up earlier. These two sites motivate me because on one site I see one of the great fathers of Rose Hill Church being honored as a fisher of men. I see color and creativity, artistic windows portraying Jesus and His disciples, salvation, hope, and everything that those windows represent. I get a deep sense of the glory that this church had in years past and the amount of hard work that was put into building this church. On the other site I see a drab, boring sign in an inconspicuous spot with humorous if not empty words stating "nothing happened here." The two sites are complete polar opposites.

I want to leave you with this challenge this morning: think about the contrast between these two sites my friends, we are in a reconstruction process at this church. Everyone of us here are being called by God to first repent in whatever areas of our lives are far from God, rebuild our temples, and rebuild this church with the faith and hope that God is about to do something far greater than ever before right here in our midst, starting first with each one of us individually. My friends, please don't compare yourselves with anyone else, don't compare our church with the past or with the church up the street. This is a new work of God on a new foundation, and we can either sit around and do nothing or come to Him in genuine repentance, rebuild His temple, and watch His greater glory fall upon us!

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ADDENDUM: Holy, Clean, and Unclean, by Paul Hudson

Why holiness? The earth and everything in it stood ready to become a beautiful sanctuary for God and His beloved creation. The only rule in humankind's approach to God was a simple exercise of the will. That is, one "do not" that kept the door to a whole host of "do not's" closed. Yet, through that door, the mystery of holiness was unveiled. Further, through that door, humans looked onto holiness from the outside, from a new perspective that not only defined holiness, but also defined their own nature as unholy. Leviticus pours into God's creation an unlocked set of rules and rituals that form the foundation for the knowledge of good and evil. Through this book, we are faced with the incompatibility of holiness and uncleanness. We are faced with the hard reality that anyone who wishes to approach God and live must do so on His terms or die, for God is holy and those who approaches Him must be holy.

The Concepts of Holy, Clean, and Unclean and its Problems

The meanings of holy, clean, and unclean distinguish the difference between that which is sanctified and set apart by God for His divine purpose and that which is not. I prefer to define holy in my own words as "set apart," along with Schnittjer's definition, "cut above, separate, other, different, unique" (290). Thus, being holy literally means being entirely separated from, in all aspects, that which is not holy, and being entirely set apart to and for God. Further, whatever is holy, clean, and unclean can only be defined by God and there is no allowance for the human mind to judge why something is or is not so. For God's reasons for deeming holiness and cleanness do not lie within the logical realms of the human mind, and this perfectly explains why dying humans are able to be set apart for God while being sentenced to die in the flesh. Holiness

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is analogous to God's perfect order in the spiritual realm, according to God's words, and holiness and uncleanness are entirely incompatible (Alexander 244).

Further, to be clean or unclean designates whether something is "ceremonially fit or polluted" (Schnittjer 326); God's designation as such is simply because He designates it to be so. I prefer to extend this idea by saying that although there may not be purely intrinsic reasons for clean or unclean designations, God's designations denote where the spiritually holy opposes the spiritually unholy, and they are to be distinguished and separated at the intersections of their physical realities. Therefore, that which is unclean represents a physical manifestation of the unholy that must remain separate from the holy because of its corrupting nature (Alexander 245). Yet, whatever is made holy and clean in the physical has been designated so by God's word according to His Spirit, and it is made so and designated so in spirit, even as the flesh decays and dies. As such, that which is corrupt is inhabited by that which is incorrupt.

The problem with God's holiness in relation to humankind is that, by necessity, holiness kills that which is unholy. Like approaching radioactive material, the closer one gets, the more one is pierced through until the inner being is entirely undone and the flesh wastes away. The effect of God's holiness is much the same to the sinful being--- it is, in the words of Schnittjer, "dangerous" (290). As such, it must be understood that holiness and uncleanness are entirely incompatible, which necessitated the sacrificial system that made it possible for the Israelites to draw near to God (Alexander 245). Additionally, the problem with uncleanness is its corrupting nature. Like a virus, unclean things invade through contact and corrupt its host--- that is *the nature* of evil. However, there is nothing of this sort that can invade God's nature because God's holiness destroys, by necessity, everything unholy that approaches His presence—it must be so,

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for it is His nature. This is precisely why Nadab and Abihu were consumed by the fire from God's presence (Lev. 10:2); they approached holiness in an unholy way. Their approach was coming from a place of uncleanness, they were not made clean by God. Thus, the principle at hand is that God must be approached precisely and entirely on His terms and in the way that He has instructed.

The Importance of the Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement was a yearly ritual for the Israelites that ensured a continuing relationship with God (Alexander 255). There were three parts: first, the sanctuary purification, which was done by Aaron alone according to very specific instructions about his garments and the sacrifices (Lev. 16:1-19); second, the release of the scapegoat and subsequent washing, representing the carrying away of all the sins of the people (Lev. 16:20-26); third, the two burnt offerings presented outside of the camp (Lev. 16:27-28). The whole ritual was designed to atone for all of the sins of both the high priest, Aaron, and the Israelite people. As such, it was not enough that the people sacrificed for their sins throughout the year, their sins were too numerous. Thus, the Day of Atonement covered every sin left uncovered (257). Of peculiar note is the necessity of the high priest to cleanse the Holy of Holies, which denotes the spreading, corrupting nature of sin and its seriousness (257). With the yearly cleansing of the holiest place in the world being mandated by God, the people of Israel were most certainly faced with the dire consequences of their sin. What a relief and moment of inner joy it must have been to watch the scapegoat wander off into the wilderness, carrying away the sins of the whole people. What a privilege and what grace--- a temporary grace yet meant to be so because of the perfect sacrifice that would soon come: Jesus the Lamb of God.

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Application

In sum, Christians must place the highest premium on holiness. They must understand the impossibility for holiness and uncleanness to abide together. They must also understand that anything unclean in nature that has not been made clean by God's providence cannot approach God and live. God's holiness is such that it cannot be corrupted. The nature of evil is like a virus, it corrupts whatever it contacts. God's holiness cannot be invaded by evil and cannot be accompanied by evil, for God's holiness exterminates evil on sight. There is only one satisfaction that cleanses humankind, enabling them to approach God--- that is, the satisfaction found in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The blood of Jesus, the ultimate, atoning sacrifice (Rom. 3:25), cleanses the covered person, takes the sin and guilt, and gives pass into the Holy of Holies where harmonious relationship with God awaits. We approach God not on our own terms, but according to that which God has determined--- through the cleansing blood of His Son, Jesus.

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