

A CALL TO COMMITMENT

Haggai 1:1 – 2:23

Introduction

[From Illy]... TOP PRIORITY

In the late 19th century John Wanamaker opened a department store in Philadelphia. Within a few years the enterprise had become one of the most successful businesses in the country. But operating his store wasn't Wanamaker's only responsibility. He was also named Postmaster General of the United States, and he served as superintendent for what was then the largest Sunday school in the world at Bethany Presbyterian Church. When someone asked him how he could hold all those positions at once, he explained, "Early in life I read, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' The Sunday school is my business, all the rest are the things." One evidence of Wanamaker's desire to keep the Lord's work first in his life was a specially constructed soundproof room in his store. Every day he spent 30 minutes there praying and meditating upon God's Word. He had his priorities straight!

The prophet Haggai was dealing with people who had a problem with their priorities. I believe that his message is one with which every one of us can identify. But before we get into that, some background...

Author – Haggai – born during the captivity of Judah by Babylon – The name Haggai, which means "festal" or "festive" suggests that his birth may have occurred during a festival of Israel, or perhaps links his name with his message, anticipating the restoration of Israel's great feasts within a restored temple. Nothing is known of his genealogy.

Date – clearly identified – during the 2nd year of the reign of King Darius, that is, 520 BC. In fact the specific dates of each message are given in the book – the entire prophecy covers a period of almost 4 months, between late August and mid-December of 520 BC.

Setting – The exiles of Judah had begun returning to Jerusalem about 18 years earlier and had begun the reconstruction of the temple 16 years earlier. But their interest had lagged and now it sat unfinished for several years until God burdened Haggai with a message for the people.

There are really four messages in this book, but we are just going to split it into two basic sections – a message of Conviction – ch 1, and a message of Encouragement – ch 2.

I. A Message of Conviction

In this first chapter, Haggai comes to the people of Judah with a great burden on his heart. It is a burden the Lord has placed on Him, and it concerned the condition of the temple. This message consists of three parts:

1. The Rebuke – vv. 1-6

The prophet diagnoses the problem as being one of misplaced priorities – look at vv. 2-4 – read and explain – a mixed-up value system. It has been 16 years since they started building, yet they are saying, "This isn't the time..." They have spent their time building and renovating and enjoying their own elaborate and extravagant cedar-panelled homes, yet they are not prepared to put any effort into the construction of the temple.

vv. 5-6 – he follows up on the thought that there is something wrong with their priorities. In verse 6 he points out the emptiness of focussing on the wrong things. They go after all of the wealth and pleasures of life, yet are never satisfied, because they have neglected what was truly important.

2. The Reminder – vv. 7-11

v. 7 - "Give careful thought to (Consider) your ways" – this phrase is repeated several times in this short prophecy (already seen in v. 5), and it is a warning we would do well to heed. In this specific case, it is a call to get back to the work of rebuilding the temple – v. 8. He also reminds them of the purpose for what they are doing – to please the Lord and to glorify God.

vv. 9-11 – God points out that the troubles they have been facing are a direct result of their disobedience and procrastination.

v. 9 - The word "house" is used three times with three different meanings: home (a place to store goods); my house (the Lord's temple); his own house (one's personal dwelling). "busies himself with" (lit., "is

running for”). In v. 4, the Lord hints at their mixed up values, but now the misplaced priorities of the people are made explicit.

All of this is designed to challenge God’s people to get back to the things that are most important—to get their priorities straight—to get their focus on the building of the Lord’s house.

3. The Response – vv. 12-15

So how did the people respond to this challenge? We have the response given in vv. 12-15. It would seem that Haggai was one of the most successful of the OT prophets, because the people responded by returning to the work which they had neglected for so long. They also went with the blessing of the Lord and the assurance of His presence throughout their project.

It took just over three weeks from the time the word of the Lord first came to Haggai until the people responded and the construction work began again.

II. Messages of Encouragement

The second chapter of Haggai contains three short messages. These messages were for Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all of the remnant of the people—compare to the first message which was directed to Zerubbabel and Joshua.

1. A message of courage and glory – v. 1-9 – One of the discouragements the people faced was the fact that there were a few people there who had seen the former temple, and they could see that this reconstruction was nowhere near as glorious and majestic as the great temple of Solomon had once been. But God reminds them that their job is to persevere in the task before them. And He reminds them and us that it is His presence that makes it glorious and majestic. (Go through verses briefly pointing out esp. vv. 3-4, 6-7, 9)

2. A message is one regarding defilement and blessing – read v. 10 – this message came on the 24th day of the 9th month, three months after the beginning of the work on the temple – see 1:15. This was also one month after the prophet Zechariah began his ministry – Zech. 1:1 – eighth month of the second year of King Darius.

vv. 11-14 - To provide an object lesson for the people, God asks two questions of the priests regarding ceremonial law. The first question makes it clear that ceremonial cleanness cannot be transferred, while the second question showed that ceremonial uncleanness can be transferred (read vv. 11-13). Haggai then applied the lesson (read v. 14). Even though the people had been bringing their offerings while neglecting the rebuilding of the temple, their offerings had not been acceptable. Their sin had caused their sacrifices to be contaminated and ineffectual. And their good works, their offerings, could not transmit cleanness. In other words, sin is contagious, righteousness is not.

vv. 15-19 – God calls them to again consider their situation. When they were living in sin, with their priorities mixed up, ignoring the house of God, they were suffering, Their harvests were poor, they found themselves lacking (vv. 15-17). But now, having renewed their relationship with God, they have the promise of God that He will bless them. Read vv. 18-19 and comment.

3. A message regarding God’s sovereignty – read vv. 20-23 – God’s power over the nations, and His sovereignty in choosing Zerubbabel.

[From Illy]... THE SIGNET RING OF GOD

In Bible days, a signet was either a ring or a stamp of cast metal, often made of gold. It was used to press the signature of the owner, usually a member of royalty, into a soft substance used as seals or on documents. The person who was given the privilege of carrying the king's signet was always carefully selected because he was being entrusted with royal authority. He had great favor in the king's eyes. Zerubbabel, therefore, who was made like the Lord's signet ring, was highly favored by God. He acted on His behalf to get the people to get the cherished temple rebuilt.

Conclusion

So what are the lessons for us from this little book of Haggai? First let me say that there is a lot more than we have time for here. I highly recommend taking more time to study this message for yourself, but let me just suggest a couple of things.

1. Misplaced priorities hinder the work of God (1:3-4, 9)
2. Obedience and reverence are prerequisites for spiritual blessing – it is never too late to start obeying (1:12-15)
3. Courage comes from knowing God's presence (2:1-4)

Let me conclude by asking you, what things have you been neglecting in your life. In what ways have you drifted away from the Lord and His work? What unfinished work do you have lying around?

God used several ways to renew the interest of the people of Haggai's day in his building project, but one of the key things was this call to personal evaluation. "Consider your ways." "Give careful thought to your ways." Could it be that the Lord is saying to us today, "It's time to make some changes in the direction you're going." God will not be satisfied until He brings us to the place of putting Him first.