

It's Time to Get Back to Work!

The VISION Newsletter / November 2015

Pastor E. Keith Hassell

Haggai 1:1–15 (NKJV) *"In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, ² 'Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, saying: "This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." ' ³ Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, ⁴ 'Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?' ⁵ Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Consider your ways! ⁶ You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes.' ⁷ Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Consider your ways! ⁸ Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified,' says the Lord. ⁹ 'You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?' says the Lord of hosts. 'Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. ¹⁰ Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. ¹¹ For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands.' ¹² 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 feared the presence of the Lord. ¹³ Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, spoke the Lord's message to the people, saying, 'I am with you, says the Lord.' ¹⁴ 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, ¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius."*

The prophet Haggai's ministry covered a period of less than four months during the second year of King Darius' reign which lasted from 522-486 B.C. This means that the year of Haggai's ministry in history was 520 B.C. The prophet Haggai joined the exiles about sixteen years after they had returned to rebuild the temple in 536 B.C.

By the time that the prophet Haggai arrived, the exiles of Israel had started the restoration of the house of God. They had restored the altar and its sacrifices. They had also restored the foundation of the temple. However, the work was not without opposition. Eventually the work ceased because of the enemy's opposition, harassment, and legal challenges. The restoration of God's house remained idle as people retreated to their own personal lives to build and care for their own houses. God, however, had not changed His mind about the restoration of His house. The enemy's opposition did not change the reason He had delivered them from Babylon and brought them back to Jerusalem.

In order to stir the people back into action, God raised up two prophets, Zechariah and Haggai, who exhorted the people to finish the work. Through faith and obedience the people heeded the words of the prophets and completed the temple within five years. The temple was dedicated in 519 B.C.

In the same way, Jesus is building His church. He has called His people, you and me, to be His workers in the effort. We have seen great success but, like Israel, in recent times the church also faced great opposition, harassment, and legal challenges. Many Christians have retreated back into their own personal lives, leaving God's house neglected and His work unfinished.

It is important to consider the three reasons that the people stopped the work God had sent them to do. The first problem was *disinterest*. In Haggai 1:1-15 we see that the people had become more interested in building beautiful houses for themselves. God is not against His people being blessed with nice houses. He is against His people making their houses a priority at the expense of neglecting His house. When God's people put their own house before the house of God, the blessing of God begins to stop. God raised up the prophet

Haggai to remind the people that their personal investment in their own lives would be fruitless because they neglected of the house of God (Haggai 1:3-11). He reminded them that when they put God first He will be glorified. When He is glorified then they too would be blessed (Haggai 1:8).

We see this principle at work in the life of King David. King David was a blessed man. He lived in a nice house but realized that the Ark of the Covenant of God was still in a tent. As a result, we have the record in 1 Chronicles 17 of David's desire to build God a house, a temple, for His presence to dwell in. Because of David's desire, God promised in return to build David's house, i.e. a royal dynasty. David discovered that when he put God's work first, that God would give special attention to that which concerned him.

We often lose focus on the importance of putting God first. We become worried about so many things. As a result, we feel that we do not have time for God. But this is the opposite of what we should do. If we want God's help and blessing upon our lives, then we must put Him first. Jesus said in Matthew 6:33 (NKJV) *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."* God already has a plan to meet our needs if we will put Him first!

The second problem was *discouragement*. In Haggai 2:1-9 we see that some among the older generation who had seen Solomon's temple were disappointed. In their eyes, the beauty of the restored temple did not compare to the beauty of Solomon's Temple. The rebuilt temple lacked the décor of gold, silver, bronze, and beautiful tapestries available under King Solomon's reign. Although God had worked wonders to bring about the restoration of His temple in Jerusalem, the older generation was discouraged with the results. The prophet Haggai addressed their discouragement saying, *"Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing?"*¹ Haggai understood that discouragement is contagious. The discouragement of the older generation was threatening to discourage the efforts of the younger generation who were eager and motivated to do the work. God's sent the prophet Haggai to overcome their *discouragement* in two ways. The first was through *encouragement*: *"Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel," says the LORD; 'and be strong Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong all you people of the land,' says the LORD, 'and word; for I am with you,' says the LORD of hosts."*² We find that the prophet Zechariah also brought a word of encouragement to God's people saying: *"For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. These are the eyes of the LORD, which scan to and from throughout the whole earth."*³ The point of the prophet's encouragement was that they not be discouraged by small beginnings because God will use small things to do great things!

The second way the prophet Haggai helped them overcome discouragement was to inspire vision for the future. They needed to see today's seemingly small results through the lens of vision for a glorious future. God promised them that the glory of the latter house would exceed the glory of the former house (i.e. Solomon's Temple): *"The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former," says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace.' Says the LORD of hosts."*⁴ It takes people of vision today to prepare for the glorious work of God in future generations. This kind of vision for the future is illustrated in what has been called "The Cathedral Principle". During the Middle Ages when the great Christian cathedrals were being built, one of the first things that the builders would do was to plant oak trees. It would take up to about 100 years to build a Cathedral. This meant that those who began the work of the cathedral would not finish the work. Many years later when it was time to install the root timbers the younger generation of builders would cut down the oak trees planted by the previous generation to use for the timbers. Cathedrals were made possible because of the foresight of the older generation to plan and to plant for future success.

The third problem was *dissatisfaction*. In Haggai 2:10-23 we see that the people expected an immediate reversal of all the years of loss. I have found that patience is a great problem in the church today. People want and expect immediate results. When results are not immediate, people become impatient and dissatisfied leading to restlessness. In their restlessness they either give up or seek to get faster results on their own. Both extremes are counterproductive to the work of Christ building the church. How many new churches are started

¹ Haggai 2:3 (NKJV)

² Haggai 2:4 (NKJV)

³ Zechariah 4:10 (NKJV)

⁴ Haggai 2:9 (NKJV)

simply because people became impatient and dissatisfied with the results they were experiencing at the moment? In their impatience they “feel led” to launch out in ministry on their own or start a church which will “get better results”. They eventually discover that there are no shortcuts in God’s processes toward maturity!

In order to demonstrate the process of time involved in the purification process, Haggai asked a question of the priests regarding clean and unclean things on one another: *“Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Now, ask the priests concerning the law, saying, ¹² ‘If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?’”* Then the priests answered and said, ‘No.’ ¹³ And Haggai said, *‘If one who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean?’* So the priests answered and said, *‘It shall be unclean.’* ¹⁴ Then Haggai answered and said, *‘So is this people, and so is this nation before Me,’ says the LORD, ‘and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.’”* ⁵ The point is that uncleanness is infectious while holiness is not. The people should not be surprised that years of uncleanness caused by their sin and rebellion will be cleansed and reversed immediately. God promised that their renewed obedience would usher in a new day of His blessing: *“Consider now from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of the Lord’s temple was laid—consider it: ¹⁹ Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded fruit. But from this day I will bless you.”* ⁶ As God’s people begin to sow again in obedience the seeds of righteousness, they can expect God to bless with fruitfulness and harvest. The influence and authority lost by the church during its time of disobedience, God will once again restore when He shakes the nations: *“Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying: ‘I will shake heaven and earth. ²² I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I will destroy the strength of the Gentile kingdoms. I will overthrow the chariots and those who ride in them; the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother. ²³ In that day,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘I will take you, Zerubbabel My servant, the son of Shealtiel,’ says the Lord, ‘and will make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you,’ says the Lord of hosts.”*

I believe that through opposition, harassment, and legal challenges, many Christians have grown disinterested, discouraged, and dissatisfied in the work of the Lord. I believe it is time for God’s people to consider their ways. Have we left the work of the Lord and consume our time, talent, and treasure on pursuing our own agendas? Are things getting any better by failing to obey God? Have we forgotten why Christ saved us and commissioned His church? Do we think that He has changed His mind in light of the opposition, harassment, and legal challenges? No, Jesus is still building His church. It is time to get back to work! God will take care of our interests as we work with Him to build His house and finish His work. It is time to repent of our disinterest. It is time to receive divine encouragement that God is with us and He will finish it through us. We must not despise the days of small things. God will use small things to do great things! With vision, it is time to sow seeds of righteousness now in our generation that will bear fruit in the generations to come and usher in God’s glory. May God grant His provision, prosperity, power, and protection as the church rises up to finish His work in the earth!

© Edward Keith Hassell
Grace Fellowship
P.O. Box 260
Rusk, Texas 75785
(903) 683-6550

www.gracefellowshiprusk.com

⁵ Haggai 2:11–14 (NKJV)

⁶ Haggai 2:18–19 (NKJV)