

“The Lifestyles of the Selfish and Negligent” (Haggai 1:1-15)

It was a sweltering 99-degree September day in San Antonio, when a 10-month-old baby girl was accidentally locked inside a parked car by her aunt. Frantically, the mother and aunt ran around the auto in near hysteria, while a neighbor attempted to unlock the car with a clothes hanger. Soon the infant was turning purple and foaming at the mouth. It became a matter of life or death when Fred Arriola, a wrecker driver, arrived on the scene. He grabbed a hammer and smashed the back window of the car to set her free. Was he heralded a hero? “The lady was mad at me because I broke the window,” Arriola reported. “I just thought, what’s more important, the baby or the window?”¹

We live in a mixed up world with warped priorities. Our society has become consumed with things that don’t really matter. Many people have fallen into a rut of living from day-to-day, hoping just to survive, and then start the cycle over again tomorrow. Unfortunately, our world is not alone. Followers of Jesus Christ are also guilty of losing sight of the eternal and comfortably settling for the temporal. Because we’re pulled in so many different directions, it’s tempting to tell God to take a number and wait His turn. We have a house to maintain, a job that takes too much time, and endless obligations to family and friends. Spending time with God and serving Him seems like just another chore on the to-do list. But God isn’t a chore that saps our time and energy. He’s the source...He makes our time worthwhile...He gives us strength. He doesn’t hurt us—He helps us.² *God’s kingdom must come before our prosperity.*³

Today, we begin a two-part sermon series on a forgotten book of the Bible.⁴ In fact, this particular book is so forgotten that you may have trouble finding it. Haggai is the 37th book of the 39 in the Old Testament.⁵ The quickest way to turn there is to go straight to Matthew and then turn back two books and there you’ll find it. Outside of Obadiah, Haggai is the shortest book in the Old Testament, so be careful not to flip past it.

Now in order to understand the book of Haggai, we need to get a grasp of several important points of biblical history. First of all, when Solomon was king of Israel (970-930 B.C.) he built a magnificent temple in Jerusalem. It was constructed of such expensive material that people came from throughout the ancient world to gaze upon it. The Jews rightly regarded it as the greatest national treasure. They revered the temple because it was the place where God dwelled with man. As such it represented the heart and soul of the Old Testament religion.

In the centuries after Solomon, the people repeatedly turned away from God in favor of idolatry. As a result, God used the Babylonians to judge His people and to purify them from their sin. That brings us to a very key date: 586 B.C. That was when the Babylonian army, under King Nebuchadnezzar, defeated Judah, destroyed the walls of Jerusalem, laid waste to the city, and utterly destroyed Solomon’s temple. Nothing was left when the Babylonians were finished. It was like Berlin after the allied forces were through in World War II. The entire city was a smoking ruin of rubble.

Meanwhile, the Jews were taken into captivity in Babylon. Fifty long years passed and then God raised up Cyrus of Persia who permitted the Jews to return, under the leadership of a man named Zerubbabel. In 538 B.C. he led about 50,000 Jews back to Judah.⁶ These were committed believers who were willing to leave the comforts of pagan Babylon and return to their homeland. These Jews understood that the promises of God to His people involved the Promised Land. Once they arrived, they found shocking devastation. Nothing had changed since the defeat some 50 years earlier. Immediately, the returnees set about to rebuild the temple in about 536 B.C. They re-laid the foundation amid a great celebration (see Ezra 3 for details). Then suddenly the Samaritans (who hated the Jews) began to oppose them. After all, the Samaritans had no reason to want the temple rebuilt or for the Jews to return to prosperity. Because of their constant opposition, the Jews stopped the rebuilding process and never got started again. After all, there was plenty of other work to do—they were trying to restart a nation from scratch.

As the years passed, slowly but surely Jerusalem came to life again. Homes were built, stores opened, commerce established, fields planted, crops harvested, and life began to resemble something of a normal pattern. There was only one problem. The temple foundation still lay in ruins—overgrown with weeds. Every time the Jews passed it, it stood as a mute reminder of their failure to take care of God’s house.⁷ Sixteen years pass. Now we come to the summer of 520 B.C.⁸ God raises up Haggai to deliver four brief messages in five months—from August to December, 520 B.C.⁹ When I say brief, I mean really brief. The whole book is only 38 verses long. You can easily read it in less than 10 minutes. The message of this little book is clear: It’s high time to finish rebuilding the temple!

You might wonder why the temple was so important. Just remember that in the Old Testament the temple was the center for worshiping God. It represented God’s presence on earth.¹⁰ To allow the temple to lay in ruins was to neglect the worship of God. Thus, God’s reputation was at stake in the rebuilding. The world would draw wrong conclusions if the temple were never rebuilt. They would assume that the Jews didn’t care about their God. At the same time, the Jews were also teaching their children that God doesn’t matter. Thus, rebuilding the temple was a major issue to God—and should have been to the people.

For our purposes, we are not drawing strict parallels between the Old Testament temple and our church building.¹¹ In the church age, God’s temple is not a physical building, but rather His people, both individually and corporately.¹² God dwells in individual human hearts, and together we are being built into the temple or house of God.¹³ To continue building the temple is to devote ourselves to building others in Christ so that their lives are a proper dwelling for God. We must always remember that *God’s kingdom must come before our prosperity*. Tragically, the sad reality is...

1. We are prone to put our prosperity above God’s kingdom (1:1-11). This is the default mode on all of our fallen “computers.” If we give no thought to how we’re living we will naturally live for our own agendas, not for God’s. It is easy to keep drifting towards loving the world if we don’t fight against it.¹⁴ As we study this passage, we must see ourselves and our own sinful tendencies in this story. Please look at 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 Zerubbabel¹⁵ the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak,¹⁶ the high priest.”** Now doesn’t that verse just grab you? Do you know anyone who has this as a life verse? I didn’t think so. The significance of this verse is simply to reveal the precise times of this book that were already discussed in the intro.

Haggai begins his first sermonette in 1:2: **“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.’”**¹⁷ Proportionately, Haggai claims to speak the word of the Lord more than any other prophet in Scripture (26 times in 38 verses). Furthermore, he refers to God as “the Lord of hosts” 14 times.¹⁸ He is saying, “God is the Lord over all the armies of heaven and earth, and I am bringing you His message, so you’d better listen!”¹⁹ The application is that we must accept the Bible as the authoritative word of the Lord of hosts and submit to it. When it confronts the way we live, we can either resist it by making up more excuses or we can obey it. But one-time obedience is not enough. We must deliberately and continually obey if we want to keep our priorities in order.

It is worth noting that Israel is called “this people,” instead of “My people.” This is an obvious term of distancing. If I go home tonight and Lori says, “Do you know what *your* son did today?” You can bet that I am not going to be happy with what I am about to hear. But if she says, “Do you know what *our* son did?” Then I’m probably going to be proud.²⁰ Haggai’s point is that God is displeased with His children because they have put their work before His work. Furthermore, they excuse their negligence with lame excuses.²¹ God’s people didn’t say, “We won’t rebuild the temple.” They *intended* to do it—eventually.²² But they said, “This isn’t the time.” Tragically, God’s people have failed to complete His temple and they are quite content. Yet, God’s word to His people is, “Finish what you started!”

Have you ever had a renovation contractor rip out your walls and flooring and then disappear? How about a mechanic who removes parts of your car and then goes off and works on someone else's car? It makes you mad, doesn't it? Now imagine how God feels when we start doing something for Him and then disappear and go off and do something for ourselves. Do you think this would annoy God? Absolutely!

We're all prone to make excuses for why we are not obedient to put God first with the time and money He entrusts to us. Sometimes we even use the Bible to support our excuses. "The Bible says that if a man doesn't provide for his own family, he's worse than an unbeliever and has denied the faith (1 Tim 5:8). I'm just trying to obey that verse by providing for my family. But *someday* I'll have all the kids through college and the bills paid, and *then* we'll give more to the Lord's work." Or, "This is a hectic time in our family life. The kids demand so much attention. Every day is taken up with meeting their needs. But *someday* we'll be through this phase, and *then* we'll get involved in the church."²³ Yet, the word of the Lord to us is *God's kingdom must come before our prosperity*.

Haggai now moves into rebuke mode. In 1:3-4, he goes for the juggler by posing a question: "**Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 'Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?'**" The term "paneled houses" in 1:4 refers to the practice of laying wood paneling over the basic stone walls and indicates that the people had gone far beyond providing for their real needs and were primarily concerned with personal luxury while totally neglecting the temple.²⁴ Now please understand, there's nothing wrong with having a nice home. This isn't an attack on riches or big houses. But it's wrong to own a nice home while God's work suffers. It's a matter of misplaced priorities.

God is ticked because His people have paneled houses while His house is in ruins! So in 1:5, Haggai proclaims, "**Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Consider your ways!'**" The phrase "Consider your ways" comes from a Hebrew idiom "Set your heart on your ways."²⁵ Haggai's words are blunt, plain-spoken, direct, and vivid. He pulls no punches and wastes no words. He is the foreman of the Old Testament. I see him with a hardhat and a tool belt walking around the construction site giving orders left and right. He has only one goal in mind: Get that temple rebuilt and do it now!²⁶ He wants God's people to consider or evaluate their ways in response to their priorities. This leads to the natural question, "What was the result of the misplaced priorities?" What were the symptoms? What happens when God gets squeezed out?"

Haggai breaks into a kind of synonymous parallel poetry at 1:6. There are five pairs that all say essentially the same thing: All your effort is in vain.²⁷

- **"You have sown much, but harvest little."** God's people worked the ground but nothing really came of it. No matter how hard they tried, they just seemed to be spinning their wheels.
- **"You eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied."** Their metabolisms somehow did not allow their food to be properly digested. Maybe this refers to people who try to deal with life's problems by eating too much. It doesn't work. All you do is gain too much weight. I think this is an illustration of seeking life and happiness through *pleasure*.
- **"You drink, but there is not enough to become drunk."** These people were unable to drown their sorrows because of the inadequate vintage. Nothing satisfied or brought pleasure.
- **"You put on clothing, but no one is warm enough."** Their clothes were not sufficiently heavy to keep out the winter's damp chill. Perhaps we could change this for our culture to say, "You buy new clothes, but the styles change." Perhaps this is indicative of seeking life through *praise*.
- **"He who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes."** The last figure is one of economic distress. Somehow the people's income failed to meet their expenses; money seemed to disappear through holes in their pockets. It is possible that inflation was working against solvency, as in our day.

I think most of us can identify with this. Do you run out of money before you run out of month? To compensate for this do you work so much that you don't have time for God or family? Are you seeking life through *possessions*?²⁸

All these figures speak of the hardship that befalls people who have not included the Lord in their plans and who are preoccupied with their own interests. In order to shake His people out of their complacency, the Lord disciplined them by frustrating their plans, their agendas, and their fruitfulness.²⁹ The simplest necessities of life—food, drink, and clothing were not being met. We lose when we put ourselves ahead of God.

This is the Law of the Unproductive Harvest. It happens to us over and over until we learn that God will not be mocked. Why would God do this? He allows us to suffer the results of our wrong choices in order to get our attention, to convict of sin, and to lead us to repentance.

You may protest, “Don't get so personal,” while admitting, “I am less satisfied; I do work longer and harder, yet I seem to get further and further behind in my bills and cannot buy or do as much with my earnings.” May I suggest that one possible reason we seem to be getting further behind is that God is trying to capture our attention. If in studying His Word we cannot hear our Lord calling us to turn back to Him, to set Him at the top of our priorities, then so great is His love for us that He will speak to us at the checkout counter in the grocery store. He will shout at us through our wretched state of misery and dissatisfaction with our jobs and our life's achievements.

All too often we have placed other goals, interests, and joys ahead of the place we should have reserved for the living God: our children's educations, our children's little league games, our advancement in the company, and our leisure time on the weekends.³⁰

After rebuking the people for their indifference, Haggai exhorts the people to rebuild the temple. In 1:7-8 Haggai says, **“Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains,³¹ bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased³² with it and be glorified,’ says the LORD.”** Haggai commanded the people to go up into the mountains and bring down timber. Apparently, the timber that they purchased for rebuilding the temple had been used to build their own houses. God's house suffered while men's houses flourished. Yet, in the same breath, Haggai states that when we put God's kingdom above our prosperity He is pleased and glorified. God is looking for pleasure and glory from His people. The main problem when we fail to put His house first is that we are indifferent to His glory. Yet, Isaiah declares that we have been created for God's glory (Isa 43:7). Therefore, we should live with this purpose in the forefront of our minds. If we don't, we will suffer the consequences.

Once again, in 1:9-11 we find that the failure of the people to prioritize God's work resulted in economic ruin and poverty. Again, Haggai proclaims, **“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,³³ ‘Because of 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.’”³⁴** The glaring neglect of the temple caused God to literally blow away all of His people's hopes. Not only did they yield few crops, but the crops that they did yield were taken away by God (1:9). And if this wasn't enough, 1:10-11 tells us that God cursed the land with a drought that affected not only the three most basic crops but everything else as well. This shouldn't have come as a surprise to any of the people, because Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 made it clear that when Israel was disobedient God would close up the heavens and dry up the land. Only in this way was He able to finally get their attention.

“You bring it home and God blows it away.” This is God’s active role in blocking our attempts to find life without Him. How might God do this to us? Cause us to have car problems or medical bills that take away our money? Why is He doing this to them? Because His temple is lying desolate. The old rules about blessing and cursing are still in effect, and since they had their priorities all wrong God was beginning to bring down curses on them. They were trying to find happiness in things and God was not going to let them (cf. Hosea 2:5-7).

What they didn’t see was that God not only understood their circumstances, He had *caused* them! They were working harder but going behind faster, but they hadn’t stopped to consider that God was trying to tell them something. Haggai came along and said, “Hey, folks, it’s *God* who controls the rain and the harvest. He is withholding His blessing because your priorities are not right! Put His house first and He will bless you. Seek first His kingdom and all these things will be added unto you.”

Meanwhile, life moved on. You started a career and a family. You had bills to pay and other demands on your time. Church and the Lord’s work drifted into the background. You still attend church as often as you can but it has become a slice of life, not the center. You tell yourself that you just don’t have time to serve as you used to. Someone else who doesn’t have the responsibilities that you have will have to get involved. Without deliberately rebelling against God, you have drifted into putting your house above God’s house. When your conscience nags, you have reasons to explain why things are this way:

- How are you spending your time? These people had plenty of time for themselves, but they didn’t have time for God. Rearrange your schedule!
- How are you spending your money? These folks claimed that they had to get their own houses built first, and then they could build God’s house. That was backwards. God says that we are to give Him the first fruits, off the top. We are to give Him the best. We are managers of all that He has given us, to invest it profitably for His kingdom.
- What are your goals? What is it that you’re aiming at in life? If you live to an old age, what do you want to look back on as far as accomplishments?
- What do you think about the most? What secretly occupies your thought life? Do you dream of getting rich, achieving fame, some hobby or leisure pursuit, or do you think about the Lord and how He wants you to spend your life?

God’s kingdom must come before our prosperity. He wants you to obey Him and prioritize Him with your life. So what is the result when we reverently obey God by putting His house above our material prosperity?

2. God blesses when we put His kingdom above our prosperity (1:12-15). After many years and much discipline, God’s people finally respond in obedience. In 1:12, Haggai writes, “**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** [lit. “feared”³⁵] **the LORD.**” Verse 12 tells us that this massive turnaround started with the leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua. That took humility on their part. It would have been easy for them as the political and spiritual leaders to resist Haggai’s message in order to preserve their esteem in the eyes of the community. “Who does this upstart prophet think that he is? We’ve never heard of him before. He has no credentials. He just comes along and says, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts’ and we’re supposed to believe him?” Yet, they responded with obedience and fear. All great movements must start with the leaders. First, Zerubbabel and Joshua committed to obeying God and then all the people followed their lead. Everything rises and falls on leadership. That principle is still true today.

Seldom has any sermon had such an immediate practical impact. Haggai preached one message and 24 days later the people began to rebuild the temple.³⁶ Would that any of my sermons had the same kind of united, enthusiastic response!

Our passage closes in 1:13-15: **“Then Haggai, the messenger³⁷ of the LORD, spoke by the commission of the LORD to the people saying, ‘I am with you,’³⁸ 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.”** I want you to notice two important truths. First, when the people obeyed, God sent word, “I am with you” (1:13). God promises to be “with” us over 100 times in the Old Testament. It’s too bad that we have ruined the word “with” by our careless use of it in everyday speech. “Yes, I’m with you; I’m behind you,” we say to our friends, but we never say how far behind we are. However, when God promises that He is with us, He means that He is right there alongside us with His strong presence. In fact, so real is His presence that when He is with us our service to our Lord is not a solo performance, but a team effort; the strong Son of God stands alongside us as we teach, sing, or serve in His name.³⁹ In whatever act of Christian service you and I do, God is right there with us. If we have God with us, we have everything. If God is with us and for us, who can be against us (Rom 8:31)? If God seems distant in your life, perhaps your priorities have gotten mixed up. When you put God truly in first place you experience a new awareness of His presence. When we take one step forward, the Lord gives us the ability to complete the task. When we put God’s house above our prosperity, He truly blesses us.

Second, God’s people were able to obey because He “stirred up” their spirits (1:14). While we are responsible to get our priorities in order, when we do it, it is because God has moved in our hearts. This is an important note because it reminds us that God’s work ultimately depends on God. He must give the orders; He must give the energy; He must give the desire; and then He must stir up the spirits of His people before anything good will be done. In the end, God has arranged the moral universe so that He alone gets the glory for any good that is accomplished. Everything depends on Him, yet He holds us fully accountable to do His will. Even so, without His enablement His will will never be done. This is not only a mystery it is also a great encouragement, because in the final analysis everything depends on God.

This story teaches us something about getting started again. I find tremendous encouragement in this story. After all, it’s hard to get started after 16 years. I’m sure the Jews never meant to let the temple lie in ruins that long. But after a few months the weeds began to overgrow the site, and at that point it was easier just to let it go. Maybe they felt guilty, and I’m sure that over the years they established several Temple Completion Task Forces to study the problem and make recommendations. But despite their good or not-so-good intentions, nothing ever happened. I know that some of us feel stuck today. You need to get started again; you need a new direction in your spiritual life; you want to begin again, but you don’t know how and you don’t know where and you don’t know what to do.

We make precisely the same mistake today. I know many people who truly intend to give generously to the Lord’s work. Each paycheck they sincerely intend to give something to God. But first they pay the mortgage or the rent, then they pay the electric bills, then the other utilities, then the food bill, then the credit card bills, then they set some money aside for savings and some for recreation. Pretty soon that stack of dollar bills just disappears. And so does the money they intended to give to God.

Haggai is clear: God and His work must take first place in the life of His people. Only in this way is God honored (1:2-4). Putting personal or selfish interests ahead of God is self-defeating (1:5-11). God showers His blessings on those who put His interests before their own (1:12-15).

Copyright © 2007 Keith R. Krell. All rights reserved. All Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, and 1995 by The Lockman Foundation, and are used by permission.

Permissions: Feel free to reproduce and distribute any articles written by Keith Krell, in part or in whole, in any format, provided that you do not alter the wording in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. It is our desire to spread this information, not protect or restrict it. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Keith Krell, Timeless Word Ministries, 2508 State Ave NE Olympia, WA 98506, 360-352-9044, www.timelessword.com

Scripture Reading

Haggai 1:1-15

Amos 4:6-10

Deuteronomy 28

Matthew 6:33-34

Luke 12:16-21

Luke 14:26-27; 18:29-30

Philippians 3:7-8

Study Questions

1. How would I describe my Christian pilgrimage? When did I first place my faith in Christ? Looking back over my life, have I consistently maintained my walk with Christ? Was there a period when I fell away from the Lord? If so, when was this, and why did it happen? How can I ensure that I have greater consistency in my walk with Christ?
2. Presently, what are my top five priorities? (Not the priorities I want to have, not the ones I think I should have, but the ones that I *really* have.) How much thought, energy, commitment, and resources do I devote to each priority? How would my spouse, children, or friends rank my top five priorities? What do I believe God's priorities are for my life? How do the above two lists compare with God's list? How motivated am I to bring my list into line with God's list? Who can help me be more accountable for maintaining the right priorities?
3. How can a Christian succeed in a career if he or she puts God's work first? Does God want Christians to excel in their careers? Why or why not? What are the telltale signs that my vocation is consuming my life? How can I bring work, family, and church involvement into balance? Is a balance even possible? What would this look like in my life?
4. Is it okay for a Christian to have and enjoy nice things? Is "luxury" sin when it comes to homes, cars, vacations, and extravagant material possessions? Where do we draw the line? If another Christian approached me and questioned my use of wealth, how would I respond?
5. Hebrews 12:5-11 teaches that God disciplines His children. When have I sensed God's hand of chastening in my life? What form did it take? How did I respond to God's discipline? If I responded positively, how have I been changed as a result of God's intervention? What testimony could I offer to other Christians who are wrestling with being obedient to God?

Notes

¹ Craig Brian Larson, ed., *Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 188.

² Stephen M. Miller, *How to Get the Bible Into My Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 254.

³ Haggai differs noticeably from the other prophetic books. The other prophets criticize the covenant nation for overt and flagrant sins such as idolatry or superstitious worship, social injustice, or spiritual and physical adultery, violence, and rejection of God's law. Haggai has to contend with a much more subtle but no less soul-damaging attitude on the part of the people of God; that of apathy and indifference in service and worship. Thus Haggai confronts us with the call to examine our priorities in life. Donald A. Leggett, *Loving God and Disturbing Men* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 132.

⁴ It might surprise those in the church today who hardly know where to find the book of Haggai that it played a vital role in the ministry of that morning star of the reformation, Savonarola, who in November 1494 preached a challenging series of messages from this prophet. Later Scotland's most powerful preacher, John Knox, also found it to be a very relevant book in his ministry of renewal and reformation. Leggett, *Loving God and Disturbing Men*, 132.

⁵ The events of the book of Haggai occurred 2500 years ago. 520 B.C. is very near the end of OT history. The only books that come later are Nehemiah (ca. 444 B.C.) and Malachi (ca. 420 B.C.). As a side note, Haggai and Zechariah were contemporaries who prophesied about the same time.

⁶ This is approximately 3% of the population of 2 million.

⁷ Haggai's main point here is to show that the Israel that returned from Exile was really no different from the Israel that had gone into exile. Both stood under God's judgment. John Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 431.

⁸ See Bruce Wilkinson & Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 283.

⁹ The Book of Haggai consists of four precisely dated messages from the Lord. The first (1:1-15) was on the first day of the sixth month in the second year of Darius (1:1, August 29, 520 B.C.). The second (2:1-9) came on the 21st of the seventh month (2:1, October 17th). The third (2:10-19) and fourth (2:20-23) messages came on the same day, the 24th of the ninth month (2:10, 20; December 18th).

¹⁰ Although God is everywhere, the temple was the place on earth where God dwelled in a special sense. He revealed His glory there.

¹¹ Nevertheless, the material (i.e., the church building) is still a very real symbol of the spiritual. When a local church is careless about the material place of assembly, the place of its worship and its work, it is a sign and evidence that it is not very spiritually healthy.

¹² See 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16.

¹³ See Eph 2:21; 1 Pet 2:5.

¹⁴ Steven J. Cole, "Putting First Things First" (Haggai 1:1-15):

<http://www.fcfonline.org/content/1/sermons/021603M.pdf>.

¹⁵ The first message is addressed to "Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel" and "Joshua son of Jehozadak." According to Ezra 2:2 and elsewhere, this is the Zerubbabel who led the exiles back to Judea. Haggai 1:1 (cf. Ezra 3:2, 8; 5:2; Neh 12:1; et al.) says he was the son of Shealtiel. In addition he was the grandson of Jehoiachin (Jeconiah in Matt 1:12). According to 1 Chronicles 3:19, Pedaiah was his father and Shealtiel his uncle but this problem may be dealt with either through adoption or the levirate law. The identification of Zerubbabel with Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:8, 11; 5:14, 16) raises more problems than it solves.

¹⁶ "Joshua son of Jehozadak" is spelled "Jeshua son of Jozadak" in Ezra (3:2, 8, et al.; cf. Neh 12:1, 8). Apparently he was a direct descendant of Aaron the Levite, the first high priest. That was Joshua's role here, the holder of the highest office in the religious hierarchy.

¹⁷ Exactly what lay behind this remark of the people is not certain. Perhaps they thought that the seventy years of predicted captivity were not yet up and that they would be out of God's will if they built the temple before those years were past. If they counted the captivity from 586 B.C., then only sixty-six years had passed. If, however, they counted from 605 B.C. (the first invasion of Nebuchadnezzar), then the time was well past. A second explanation of their statement relates to the political situation of that time. From Ezra we learn of the opposition of the local population, mostly Samaritans. Perhaps the returnees were saying that it was better to wait for more propitious times, a more favorable climate.

¹⁸ This title appears 14 times in Haggai and 265 times in the Hebrew Bible. "Yahweh" occurs 34 times in the 38 verses of Haggai.

¹⁹ See the NLT's rendering "the Lord of Heaven's Armies."

²⁰ Hampton Keathley IV, "Haggai": http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=977.

²¹ When the Jews considered resuming construction, most of them said it was not yet the right time. Their decision may have rested on the continuing threat from their neighbors. Or perhaps they felt that to finish the temple then would violate Jeremiah's prediction of a 70-year captivity (Jer 25:11-12; 29:10). Another possibility is that they thought God Himself would finish it (Ezek 40-48). Dr. Thomas L. Constable, "Notes of Haggai" (<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/haggai.pdf>, 2007), 7.

²² Pritchard lists the following excuses: 1) God wants us to take care of our own families, doesn't he? 2) The job is too big. We'll never finish it. 3) Not our fault so it's not our job. 4) Someone else will do it if we don't. 5) We need to pray about it some more. 6) I don't think we need a temple anyway. 7) The time just isn't right. 8) Our motives are good, but we're just too busy!!!

²³ Cole, "Putting First Things First."

²⁴ Paneling is otherwise known in the OT only in connection with the temple (1 Kgs 6:9) and the royal palace (2 Kgs 7:3, 7). It implies decoration and luxury (cf. NCV "fancy houses"; TEV "well-built houses"; NLT "luxurious houses"). The impropriety of the people living in such lavish accommodations while the temple lay unfinished is striking. See NET Study Notes.

²⁵ Other possible renderings include: "Think carefully about what you are doing" (NET); "Give careful thought to your ways" (NIV); and "Look at what's happening to you!" (NLT)

²⁶ Ray Pritchard, "Does Your Bag Have Holes?" (Haggai 1:1-15): http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermons/read_sermon.asp?id=472.

²⁷ The Hebrew text uses a series of infinitive absolutes in the questions that are asked in Haggai 1:6 to emphasize their eternal and universal relevance. See Kaiser, *Micah-Malachi*, 255.

²⁸ Some of this comes from Keathley IV, "Haggai."

²⁹ It's not that God always withholds material blessing from nongivers; He may provide the same amount for givers and nongivers, but for the giver it will go much further. For a nongiver, money—no matter how much—disappears, as if put in a purse with holes in it. Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1989, 2003), 342.

³⁰ See Walter C. Kaiser, *Micah-Malachi: The Communicator's Commentary* (Dallas: Word, 1992), 256-257.

³¹ With this verse the first positive part of Haggai's initial message begins, marked by three imperatives: "Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house." The original temple was built with cedars from Lebanon (1 Kgs 5:5-6). It is uncertain whether this verse refers to the mountains far to the north or the lower but rugged hills around Jerusalem. The limited financial resources of the people would point to the more modest forests of the nearby hills. The reference to wood rather than stones may further indicate that only the interior work was left to be done.

³² There may be a play on words between the "I may be pleased" (*erseh*) of 1:8 and the "runs" (*rasim*) of 1:9.

³³ There are six occurrences of the phrase "declares the LORD of hosts" in Haggai (1:9; 2:4, 8, 9, 23 [twice]) and six occurrences of the shorter phrase "declares the LORD" (1:13; 2:4 [twice], 14, 17, 23). This is unusual for a book as short as Haggai. Obviously the writer wanted to emphasize the divine origin of his message to the people.

³⁴ Some of the affected areas of 1:11 are arranged in pairs: fields and mountains, wine and oil, men and cattle. Though ordinarily receiving more dew than the fields, even the mountains are denied it. Thus not only the grain that grows in the fields but also the vineyards and olive orchards that normally grow on the mountains will be affected. Grain that supplies the staple bread, grapes that provide the basic beverage, and oil used for a number of things will all be in short supply. The people used oil for cooking, fuel, medicinal purposes, lotions, and tanning leathers. What a tragedy to have these three basic crops fail! The cattle also would suffer as a result of the people's faithlessness. Throughout the Bible it is clear that the nonhuman creation suffers because of the sin of man. Ecology has biblical support. From the beginning, when thorns resulted from Adam's disobedience, to the end, when we read of a new heaven and a new earth with harmony between natural enemies in the animal world, it would appear that the happiness and productivity of the entire creation depends on the relationship of man to God and man to man.

³⁵ Some think that the fear of God is an Old Testament concept, and that we are to focus on His love. But the New Testament has plenty of references to fearing God (Matt 10:28; 2 Cor 7:1; Eph 5:21; Col 3:22; 1 Pet 2:17; Rev 14:7; 15:4; 19:5). While we do not need to fear His final judgment if we are in Christ, Peter tells us, "If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth" (1 Pet 1:17).

³⁶ Verse 14 records the results of that brief but strong reassurance from the Lord through His prophet. The Lord stirred the spirits of the two teachers, Zerubbabel and Joshua, and of the people; and they began to work on the temple. The date (1:15) indicates that hardly three weeks had passed from Haggai's initial sermon to the people's obedience to his orders. Perhaps those intervening weeks were spent in taking inventory of their supplies, assessing

and assigning jobs, and completing plans. Then the actual construction resumed on this twenty-fourth day of the sixth month of Darius's second year.

³⁷ In Hebrew, the words "messenger" and "work" are similar. Their use close together here reminds us that a prophecy is not a 'blessing' to be pleased about, but an instruction that should lead to action.

³⁸ The Hebrew words are different from "Immanuel," but their message is the same. Without God we can do nothing; with him all things are possible. By his divine aid this poor rabble could reconstruct a magnificent temple, repulse their enemies, seek and receive aid from an unbelieving monarch, and see dry ground bring forth food.

³⁹ Kaiser, *Micah-Malachi*, 255.