

# Haggai 1:2-6

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*The prophet Haggai urges the people of Judah to consider their ways of life and account for the infertility of the land being connected to their inattention to God's temple.*

In the previous section, the title verse (vs 1) introduced the reader to the prophet Haggai and confirmed the divine nature of his message. It tells us that the prophet received a revelation from the LORD "in the second year of Darius," and his message was directed to Judah's top civil and religious leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua. In the present passage, the revelation begins with the prophetic formula, *Thus says the LORD of hosts*, (vs 2) confirming once again the divine source of the message as God.

The Hebrew term translated as *LORD* is Yahweh, the self-existent and everlasting God who revealed Himself to Moses out of the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). The term translated as *hosts* in the phrase *LORD of hosts* is "sabaoth" in the Hebrew language. It means "armies" and often refers to the angelic armies of heaven (1 Samuel 1:3).

The phrase *the LORD of hosts* occurs frequently in the prophetic books. It even makes it into the New Testament as a Hebrew term in a Greek text (Romans 9:29; James 5:4). Often, it pictures God's power as a warrior leading His angelic army to defeat His foes (Amos 5:16; 9:5; Habakkuk 2:17). Here in Haggai, the phrase demonstrates God's power as the supreme warrior who has complete control over all human affairs. Indeed, *the LORD* is the all-powerful God,

"His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom *endures* from generation to generation."  
(Daniel 4:34).

After the prophetic formula, Haggai told his audience what the LORD said. In so doing, he provided a direct quote from the LORD concerning what the people of Judah had stated, *This people says*, "*The time has not come, even the time for the house of the LORD to be rebuilt*" (vs 2).

The phrase *this people* refers to the people of Judah, who had returned to Jerusalem from their Babylonian exile. The Suzerain (Ruler) God did not refer to them as His *people*. Instead, He used the phrase *this people* to show He was not pleased with their decision to stop the building project. They people were operating outside of His covenant ways, which they had agreed to follow. The *house of the LORD* refers to the temple in Jerusalem, which the Babylonians had destroyed when they invaded the city (2 Kings 25:8-9).

Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC, and all but the poorest people were exiled to Babylon (2 Kings 24:14). The Judeans spent about 70 years in exile in Babylonia. But during the Judeans' exile, the Persians defeated the Babylonians (Daniel 5:30-31).

When King Cyrus of Persia began to rule, “the LORD stirred up” his spirit so that “he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom” (Ezra 1:1). King Cyrus allowed all captive peoples to return to their homes. The people of Judah, having benefited from the king’s edict, returned to Jerusalem in or around 538 BC, albeit not without difficulty.

Under the governance of Zerubbabel (vs 1) and with the permission of the Persian king, the Judeans began reconstructing the temple in 536 BC (Ezra 3:8–13). They planned to complete the project but stopped working on it for about sixteen years because of the hostile intrigues of their adversaries (Ezra 4:19-21). They had adopted the perspective that *the time has not come* to rebuild the temple because they had encountered opposition. It was not a trifling opposition, but rather the direct order of the Persian king, Artaxerxes, commanding them to halt construction.

But the LORD’s plan was for His people to rebuild the temple so they could restore worship to Him there. For, according to the book of Deuteronomy, God Himself would choose a place and “establish His name there for His dwelling” (Deuteronomy 12:5). Eventually that place became Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:12). Through Haggai, God reprimanded His people for adopting a perspective based on what was comfortable, rather than continuing to pursue what God had directed.

Because the people of Judah procrastinated, thinking it was not yet *time to rebuild* the temple, *the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet* again. This time, *the LORD* confronted the people with a question that required a “No” answer. He declared, *Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?* (vv 3-4).

As shown in the translation above, the pronoun *you* is repeated in the Hebrew text for emphasis (*you yourselves*). It is like *the LORD* pointed His finger at the people and said, “Is it time for you, I mean you, to dwell in *paneled houses* while the temple remains unfinished?” The term *paneled* is “sepunim” in Hebrew. It speaks of the finishing touches of *houses*, thus contrasting the people’s well-appointed homes with the unfinished temple of God.

The people of Judah misplaced their priorities. While they continued to build well-adorned houses with *paneled* walls for themselves, they neglected the temple that was still unrepaired. The temple symbolized the LORD’s immediate presence among them, and they were neglecting it.

The question then was to challenge the people to rethink their priorities. Haggai exhorts them to change their perspective. He tells them to not only pursue their personal interests, but also put their resources into rebuilding the temple without further delay. Therefore, *the LORD of hosts* said, *Consider your ways!* (vs 5).

The Hebrew expression translated as *consider your ways* is literally “set your heart upon your ways.” Here, the word “heart” [“lēḇāb” in Hebrew] means the seat of the intellect or the rational faculties of the mind. The *LORD* used that term to invite the people of Judah to embrace a new attitude toward life.

God exhorts Judah to choose a new perspective. God has given His people a choice in what they do. One of the most important things each person has stewardship to control is the perspective they choose. God wants the people of Israel to have a renewed mind, based on God's word. As the Apostle Paul exhorts God's New Testament believers:

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”  
(Romans 12:2)

A true perspective leads to a true perspective of God, which allows us to trust Him as He is. And trusting God, with a renewed perspective, leads us to do God's will, which is to walk in an obedient manner, set apart from the world, sanctified to Him (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

Judah was part of a covenant with God, which they had broken. As a result of Judah breaking their vows to their God and “husband” they were subjected to the corrective provisions of the covenant contract, which included defeat and exile (Deuteronomy 8:19; 28:41). Israel and Judah had both elected to pursue pagan idols with its pagan culture of exploitation, deception, and violence (Hosea 4:2; Amos 5:12). Thus God had delivered them to foreign nations, as provided in His contract with Israel and Judah.

Now that Judah had been restored, they had the opportunity to walk in obedience to God, and receive His promised blessings (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). Now through Haggai, God details their experience, which shows they have not been receiving the covenant blessings God desired them to have. Haggai will connect this directly with urging them to rebuild the temple of God, that they might be blessed.

God is not manipulated by transactions; He specifically rejected worship by those who then proceeded to exploit their fellow Israelites (Amos 5:21-24). But obedience from the heart is something God rewards greatly (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Within Jewish tradition, the return of the exiles from Babylon is considered a foreshadowing of a future return from exile. Revelation says that there will be a gathering of His people out of a mystery Babylon (Revelation 17:5, 18:1-4). This might represent a spiritual gathering of Jews from among the nations of the world at the end of the age; they will be returning to the worship of their covenant God.

This tradition says Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, foreshadow the Messiah who will build Ezekiel's temple in the Messianic era (Ezekiel 40-47:12).

This would seem to fit, since one Messianic figure is named “Yeshua” (“The Lord is Salvation”) which is “Jesus” in English, and the other figure, Zerubbabel, means “born in Babylon.” The name Zerubbabel might picture Jesus as coming to earth as a human. It also fits because Jesus will be both the religious leader as well as the political leader in His kingdom (Hebrews 4:14; Isaiah 9:6; Revelation 19:6).

Haggai now recounts to Judah the cause/effect nature of His covenant with them. God promised to bless His covenant people if they would follow His ways (Deuteronomy 28:14). Of course, part of that is a natural consequence; people who love and serve one another create a culture that is both innovative as well as productive. But God also promised to pour out His divine blessings as well. Now Haggai recounts a list of five adverse consequences Judah is experiencing as a result of their disobedience to their covenant God, Yahweh.

*The LORD* described the economic hardship the people of Judah experienced in Haggai's day. Such difficult situations affected all aspects of life, as the following five statements make clear:

1. The first one reads, *You have sown much, but harvest little* (vs 6). The people of Judah worked hard to cultivate the land. They planted many crops but reaped a few of them at harvest time.
2. The second statement describes the result of Judah's weak harvest: *You eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied* (vs 6). The people of Judah experienced hunger because there was a shortage of food supply.
3. The third statement considers another result of the people's crop failure: *You drink, but there is not enough to become drunk* (vs 6). The people of Judah had little wine to drink. The quantity of wine was scant.
4. The fourth statement moves from food and drink to clothes: *You put on clothing, but no one is warm enough* (vs 6). The people of God had some wardrobe, they *put on clothing*. But their clothes were insufficient and could not protect them from the cold months of winter. This was likely either because of the poor quality of the clothes or inadequate quantity available to the people. In addition to a lack of food, the people had a lack of materials for weaving.
5. The fifth statement offers a general overview of the economic situation of the people of Judah: *He who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes* (vs 6). The expression means that the money quickly disappeared; there was not enough to supply all their needs. Though the people worked and earned money, their expenses were superior to their income. Perhaps this was because the cost of living was increasing. Such an inflation had a spiritual origin. It occurred because the people of Judah did not put *the LORD* first in their lives.

It could also be that the people's poor stewardship attitude toward God's temple was being reflected in their personal life, and they were making poor decisions with their resources.

It would be natural for humans in economic need to focus even more on their own finances. But God will give them the opposite prescription. Their economic plight is because of a lack of generosity. They need to put effort into working for others in order to gain more for themselves.

Perhaps this is because when people begin to work for one another, the resulting collaboration greatly increases productivity. Perhaps it is also because of God's blessing. In any event, God will make clear that the answer to their economic lack is to refocus their priority into serving Him, and serving one another.

## Biblical Text

<sup>2</sup>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.” <sup>3</sup>Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, <sup>4</sup>“Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house *lies* desolate?” <sup>5</sup>Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, “Consider your ways! <sup>6</sup>You have sown 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 wages *to put* into a purse with holes.”