

Haggai 1:7-11

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The prophet Haggai asks the people of Judah to reconsider their attitude toward life and rebuild the temple so that God may restore their fortunes, consistent with His covenant agreement with them.

In the previous section, we saw how the people of Judah misplaced their priorities. The LORD had allowed them to return to their homeland and expected them to rebuild His temple. The returning exiles began the building project but ran into resistance and stopped for about sixteen years, rationalizing that the time was not right to complete it. Yet, they were busy building paneled homes for themselves (vv. 2–4).

The LORD was not pleased with this, so He urged the Jewish people to consider their way of life. The lack of productivity in the land and their weak economic condition was due to their poor stewardship (vv. 5–6). The LORD reminded the Jews of the basic concept of His covenant with them, that if they would serve Him and follow His ways, they would be blessed.

The present section continues the divine exhortations. It begins with the prophetic formula, *Thus says the LORD of hosts* (v. 7). The Hebrew term translated as *LORD* is “Yahweh,” the self-existent and everlasting God (Exodus 3:14). The term translated as *hosts* is “sabaoth” in the Hebrew language. It even makes it into the New Testament as a Hebrew term in a Greek text (Romans 9:29; James 5:4). 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. Often, it describes God’s power as a warrior leading His angelic army to defeat His foes (Amos 5:16; 9:5; Habakkuk 2:17).

Here and elsewhere in Haggai, the phrase *LORD of hosts* demonstrates God’s power as the supreme warrior who has complete control over all human affairs (v. 2). Yes, *the LORD* is the all-powerful God. He is “the LORD Most High over all the earth” (Psalm 97:9). That is why He commanded the returning exiles, saying, *Consider your ways!* (vs 7).

The Hebrew expression translated as *Consider your ways* is literally “set your heart upon your ways.” In this context, the word “heart” (“lēbāḇ” in Hebrew) refers to the seat of the intellect or the rational faculties of the mind. The LORD used the expression to invite the people of Judah to embrace a new attitude toward life.

God exhorts Judah to choose a renewed perspective (Romans 12:2). He wanted them to reconsider their priorities, to reflect upon their behavior as they built paneled houses for themselves while leaving God’s temple desolate. They were taking the path of least resistance from the world, avoiding opposition by not building the temple. The Persian king Artaxerxes had

commanded them to halt rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple, and the Jews were complying to his will, rather than God's (Ezra 4:23-24).

After this assessment, the LORD proceeded with the central portion of the message. He instructed the people of Judah to *go up to the mountains* and *bring wood* (vs 8). In both ancient and modern times, *wood* is a material that people use to fuel a fire, build a house, or make a variety of furnishings, tools, implements, weapons, musical instruments, and objects of beauty.

According to Nehemiah, who was a contemporary of Haggai, the hills around the city of Jerusalem had many types of *wood* such as olive, myrtle, and palm (Nehemiah 8:15). Thus, the people of God were to go find them in the hills and *bring* them to *rebuild the temple* (vs 8). The motive for rebuilding the temple was *that I may be pleased with it and be glorified, says the LORD* (vs 8).

The completion of the temple would be pleasing to *the LORD* (for more about The Temple, read our [Tough Topics Explained article](#)). It would bear fruit. The finished project would be satisfactory to *the LORD* because it would reflect that the people were honoring Him and keeping His covenant. This would pave the way for Him to bless His covenant people. But since God received no honor, the people of Judah did not receive the benefits of God's pleasure.

The temple's reconstruction would cause God to *be glorified*. The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses a Greek word to translate *be glorified* that only appears in the New Testament twice, both in 2 Thessalonians:

"...when He [Jesus] comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed. To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thessalonians 1:10-12)

Using the 2 Thessalonians passage as a guide, it would seem that Haggai's admonition here is that God will *be glorified* because His people will be taking actions that will be seen by others, which will demonstrate their commitment to their covenant God. It is a part of their testimony. Judah will be fulfilling their assigned role to be a priestly nation, showing a good example to the surrounding nations (Exodus 19:6).

The people's neglect of the temple of God had negative consequences on their crops (v. 6). Here again, the LORD gave them an explanation of their impoverishment to show that they were under His discipline. He stated, *You look for much, but behold, it comes to little* (vs 9).

The people of Judah worked hard to cultivate the land and hoped for large harvests in return. Unfortunately, they reaped *little* at harvest time. Worse yet, what they harvested did not last long at all. It disappeared quickly and suddenly, as the LORD said, *When you bring it home, I blow it away* (vs 9).

The LORD then explained the reason for the chastening of the people. He began with the interrogative particle *Why?*, followed by the prophetic formula *declares the LORD of hosts*. Then, He provided the answer to the question: *Because of My house which lies desolate, while each of you runs to his own house* (vs 9). The solution to this problem is clear: the people must rise and rebuild the temple of God. They need to shift their priority from putting their own personal consumption first to serving their covenant God first (Matthew 6:33).

God's covenant with Israel was structured in the form of a Suzerain-vassal treaty, common to the era (for more, read [our Tough Topics Explained article: Suzerain-Vassal Treaties](#)). The basic format was that if Israel/Judah obeyed God's commands, and followed His ways, they would be blessed, and gain great benefits. If they did not, they would be disciplined (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

The primary condition of the covenant was what Jesus called the Greatest Commandment, which is to love God with all our being (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37-39). Building the temple would be a physical manifestation of putting God first, and would accordingly shape the hearts of the people to follow His ways.

This would lead to God's great blessing. Much of that blessing would be a natural consequence of following God's ways. A society that expends their energies loving their neighbors as themselves (the second greatest command) will be one that is highly productive. But God also promised to heap divine blessings (or cursings) upon Israel in addition to the natural consequences.

God desired His people to be an example of how to live constructively, in harmony with and service to one another (Leviticus 19:18). This was in stark contrast to the pagan culture of exploitation, deception, and violence (Leviticus 18).

Haggai calls the people of Judah to step away from focusing on their personal comfort. Rather than only focusing on building nice homes for themselves and their families (*each of you runs to his own house*), they needed to also emphasize spiritual service (to repair *My house which lies desolate*).

This same basic concept is also charged to New Testament believers. We are exhorted to enjoy our physical prosperity (1 Timothy 6:17) but also lay down our lives as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1-2). Without spiritual prosperity, physical prosperity is unable to satisfy. When we put the spiritual first, the physical follows (Matthew 6:33).

Judah was struggling because they did not appropriately honor the LORD. The prophet urged them to get at the task of rebuilding the temple. The temple symbolized the presence of *the LORD* among His covenant people and His promise to dwell among them in the ages to come (1 Kings 8:43). According to Haggai, failure to complete a suitable house of worship was holding Judah back from achieving the prosperity they sought.

Within the covenantal context, the Suzerain (or Ruler) God asked His covenant people to remain loyal to Him. He would bless all those who followed His precepts (Deuteronomy 28:1-14).

Conversely, He would curse those who were disloyal to Him (Deuteronomy 28:15–68). This follows the biblical principle that there are always consequences to our actions.

The principle that God disciplines those whom He loves pours over into the New Testament (Hebrews 12:5-6; Revelation 3:19). And because the people of Judah did not obey God and rebuild the temple, God disciplined them. As He said, *Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew and the earth has withheld its produce* (vs 10).

The term *dew* refers to moisture condensed from the warm air by the cold ground. It is important in Israel and Judah for the prosperity of cultivated crops and natural vegetation, especially in the dry season (April to October). The *dew* from the moist air blowing in from the Mediterranean Sea is a source of water for the otherwise arid Judean lands. In Haggai's day, the LORD caused an absence of *dew* in the land of Judah. As a result, *the earth has withheld its produce* (vs 10).

Further, the LORD declared that He *called for a drought on the land and on the mountains* (vs 11). In the ancient world, *drought* was a dangerous reality, one that could lead to famine. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had to relocate because of drought-related famine (Genesis 12; 26; 41). Here in Haggai's day, the LORD called for a *drought* that affected three essential agricultural products of Israel and Judah—the *grain*, the *new wine*, and the *oil* (vs 11; Deuteronomy 7:13).

The term *grain* refers primarily to wheat and barley (2 Chronicles 2:10). The *wine* was made from fermented grape juice. In ancient times, it was a nutritional necessity as well as a source of pleasure. The *oil* was a substance produced from the olive berry. It was used for cooking (1 Kings 17:12–16). Additionally, it was used as a cosmetic for anointing the body, for medical purposes, and for the anointing of kings and priests. Olive oil also provided fuel for lamps.

Due to their close relationship to the ongoing life of the people of Israel/Judah, *the grain, the wine, and the oil* became technical terms for the covenant blessings promised by God for obedience and withheld by Him for disobedience (Deuteronomy 7:12-13 for blessing, 28:51 for cursing).

Not only did the *drought* affect the essential agricultural products of Judah, but it also had consequences *on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hand* (vs 11). God's covenantal discipline was negatively affecting all of Judah's economic life. But this hardship could change if the people would obey the LORD by going to the mountains and bringing *wood* to build the temple (v. 8).

This emphasis on putting effort into the temple is a picture to New Testament believers, since our bodies are a temple in which God's Holy Spirit dwells (1 Corinthians 3:16). Jesus Christ echoes Haggai's message when He proclaimed this truth about putting God first in our lives. In the book of Matthew, he stated, "Seek first [God's] kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things [earthly prosperity] will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). When we serve God in this manner, we glorify and honor Him by building a temple unto Him with our lives (1 Corinthians 3:16). God has promised immense rewards for those who honor Him, and walk in His ways (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Biblical Text

⁷ Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Consider your ways! ⁸ Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified,” says the LORD. ⁹ “*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, “Because of My house which *lies* desolate, while each of you runs to his own house. ¹⁰ Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew and the earth has withheld its produce. ¹¹ 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.”