

Message #2

Haggai 1:1-6

Over the years I have read or heard some funny excuses people make for various things.

There was a wife who asked her husband to go to the gym with her and he said I can't go, I need to lose a few pounds first.

There was a young man who was pulled over for speeding and the officer said, "Don't you know that I can arrest you?" The young man said, "No, you can't, I don't have my license."

A guy was trying to make an excuse for not exercising and he said, "I can't go for a jog today; I hurt my finger."

I think one of the funniest excuses that I ever heard was from Jerry Speedy, who is now with the Lord. He was travelling north of Schoolcraft on 131 heading home after a meeting and he was doing 70 miles an hour in a 55 mile an hour zone. The police pulled him over. He walked to Jerry and said, "Do you know how fast you were going?" Jerry said, "Yes, I was going 70." Then the officer said, "Do you know the speed limit here is 55?" and Jerry said, "Yes, it is 55 but it's wrong, it should be 70." He got the police officer laughing and he said, "You sound just like my father. Go on home."

Excuses can be funny, but not when it comes to God or when it comes to obeying God's word and will. There is nothing funny about disobedience. That point is clear as we open this book of Haggai.

According to **verse 1**, it had been about 16-17 years since Cyrus permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple in 538 BC. It was now the second year reign of the King of Persia whose name was Darius. So the year was 520 BC. It was day one of the sixth month. Instead of the Temple being rebuilt, people were sitting around doing nothing for God. In fact, what we see here is this:

GOD'S PEOPLE WERE MAKING EXCUSES FOR NOT OBEYING GOD AND DOING WHAT HE WANTED THEM TO DO.

This is how the book opens. We get a list of people who are critical to the narrative in **verse 1**:

In **verse 1** of Haggai, we are introduced to six people by name:

- 1) Darius
- 2) Haggai
- 3) Zerubbabel
- 4) Shealtiel
- 5) Joshua
- 6) Jehozadak

- 1) Darius was the king of Persia who affirmed the decree of Cyrus to restore Jerusalem Temple. This is Darius I, Darius Hystaspis, who reigned from 522 BC-486 BC. He restored the Persian Empire that had been founded by Cyrus the Great. This Darius is not the Darius the Mede in the book of Daniel. This Darius lived years later. So the people of God cannot blame the government for their lack in their commitment to God and His word.
- 2) Haggai was the prophet of God. He was a contemporary of Zechariah. He had seen the Temple in all of its glory before destroyed and God raised him up as His man to communicate His word to the people that they needed to rebuild the Temple. **Whenever God does anything, He will always use a key person to do it.**
- 3) Zerubbabel was the grandson of King Jehoiachin, who had been appointed governor of Judah. He led the Jews to return from Babylon to the Promised Land in 538 BC (Ezra 2:2). It was, in part, his lack of courage and trust in God that put a stop to the building of the Temple (Ez. 4:2-5, 24). **Zerubbabel is specifically singled out here as being the recipient of this book. He was a political leader and God held him responsible to point people to the importance of having a relationship with Him. He made some mistakes as a leader but he ends up honored because he regrouped and corrected them (Haggai 2:23).**
- 4) Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel. Luke traces him back to Nathan, David's son (Luke 3:27-31). In I Chronicles 3:19 the text says that Pedaiah was Zerubbabel's father. Yet Luke specifically states that Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel (Luke 3:27). So how do we explain this? The best explanation is the Levirate marriage law of Deuteronomy 25:5-6. Shealtiel had died and Pedaiah, Shealtiel's brother (I Chron. 3:17-18) married Shealtiel's widow and she bore a son and that carried on the family name.
- 5) Joshua was the high priest who returned from Babylon, when the Jews returned to Jerusalem. He was the spiritual leader responsible to point the people in the right ways of God. **Joshua was the second leader who was the recipient of Haggai. He was the religious and spiritual leader and it was His responsibility to promote the importance of keeping God first and obeying the word of God.**
- 6) Jehozadak was the father of Joshua the high priest. He was the high priest who had been deported to Babylon in 586 BC (I Chron.6:15) during Babylonian captivity.

Now these are critical players. They became a link from the past to the present. These are critical leaders and they had the responsibility to lead the people to realize the importance of them having a right relationship with God. These leaders needed to lead a revival and restoration to the things of God. These were leaders who needed to prompt God's people to take right action.

Certainly one thing we see here is that God's people need God's leadership to courageously continue to focus on God and His word. If God's leaders don't do that, then it will affect the people. Also God's leaders are named and they are accountable.

Now these leaders knew what it was like to have the blessings of God in Israel. They knew what it was like when the Temple was standing and real worship was taking place. They needed to get the people to focus on that again.

Now there are two main parts to this opening:

PART #1 – God’s people were making excuses for not obeying God’s word and will by rebuilding the Temple. **1:2**

Notice how this opens: “Thus says the LORD of hosts” versus “what says the people.” What we have here is a contrast between God and the people. What we have is a contrast between what God says and what the people say. This has always been a contrasting problem.

Notice that God is identified as the “LORD of hosts.” Haggai uses this title for God some 14 times in this two chapter book: **1:2, 5, 7, 9, 14; 2:4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 9, 11, 23, 23**. The Hebrew “LORD” is Jehovah, the sovereign covenant name that God uses pertaining to Israel. The noun “hosts” is Tsebaoth, which means armies. Now the armies may be literal human armies or angelic armies. By Haggai using this term for God, he is emphasizing that God is sovereign over everything and everyone in heaven and on earth.

He is sovereign over all things, seen and unseen. He is sovereign over things in heaven and things on earth. He has all might and all power. So there is no excuse that will be acceptable when God has all power to do all things.

What the people were saying is that “the timing wasn’t right yet to rebuild the Temple.” Now there are times when the timing isn’t right for something. For example, there are times when one should speak and times when one should be silent. Knowing the right time is the key to wisdom (Ecclesiastes 3:7). In Paul’s ministries the timing wasn’t right at times for him to go to a specific area to minister (Rom. 1:13). We know we are in a time period known as the times of the Gentiles and God is not now setting up His kingdom in Israel. So timing can be important.

But these people were sitting around doing nothing and using as an excuse that the timing wasn’t right to rebuild the Temple. They had been doing nothing for God and justifying it for the past 16 years of their lives.

They are the ones who stopped building in the first place. They put their own house and career and family above God. They put their own prosperity at the top of the list and put God down on the list.

Their excuse was the timing isn’t right yet. This sounds so pious and so religious. This sounds so spiritual. It sounds like the people are really tuned into the timing of God. What a joke this is. We have seen this many times with people who make excuses for not going to church and giving God 3 hours per week. Well we are so busy. We only get weekends to relax. We have things we have to get done around the house so we can’t go to church.

The timing just isn't right. Now there is a new excuse with the virus. We can go to the store and the doctors and to restaurants and we can work on our house, but the timing isn't right to go to church. What God's people must realize is that the timing is always right when it comes to taking the word of God and obeying it. **The timing is always right to turn to the word of God and seek to apply it.** There is no bad timing in this. The excuse is lame.

Frankly, lame excuses is all they really are.

PART #2 – God speaks through His prophet Haggai to tell the people their timing is wrong.
1:3-6

It is interesting to notice that Haggai does not name or mention the main sins that plagued the nation. He did not preach against idolatry or evil behavior or injustice or false prophets and priests; he speaks against a lack of spiritual commitment and a neglect to put God first in their lives.

This is the word of the LORD coming directly to these people via Haggai:

Message #1 - Do you think it is time for you to live in a nice house when God's is desolate? **1:4**

The idea behind a “paneled house” was the idea of having a luxurious house that had been built with expensive wood. Often times this wood was imported cedar paneling that was used in plush homes.

As I understand this, these people did not just have a roof over their heads; they were living in plush homes. They had spent many years making sure their homes had everything.

God says do you think it is right that you have spent the last 15-16 years making your own home a nice plush existence when My house is not even in existence?

Message #2 - It is time for you to very carefully consider your ways. **1:5**

It is time to very carefully think about this and the direction you are heading. God says your priorities are way off track. The words “consider your ways” literally mean set your heart and mind on something. Haggai repeats this often in this book - **1:5, 7; 2:15, 18, 18.**

These words mean to very carefully think about and consider this. What they need to carefully consider was the real status of their hearts. They were not interested in rebuilding the Temple. This was not just a physical building issue, this was a heart issue.

It has been well observed that the book of Haggai has often been used to promote a building program in the church. But if we look carefully here at what Haggai is doing, he is not promoting a building program; he is promoting a heart analysis. The problem is not the physical building problem; the problem is a heart spirituality problem.

This was not just an issue of a building; this was an issue of the heart. People had the wrong focus in their lives. They were more focused on themselves and their own houses than they were God.

When you see a church that is physically in disrepair, it is easy to question the commitment level of the membership. When you see a life of a believer that is all focused on themselves and their house more than God, something is wrong. The commitment level of the membership is not the problem. Their hearts are the problem. What is needed with the people of God is for God's people to "consider" their ways, that is take a look at their own hearts.

Message #3 - The reason you don't seem to have enough to have a satisfying life is because you have left Me, My word, My will and My worship out of your life. **1:6**

When God's people don't put God first in their lives, they will never get what they are looking for. They will never achieve it and never have it.

Never forget this about God. He has the sovereign power not to bless one thing His people do. Make excuses for not putting Him first and His people will experience that.

Haggai had some good, specific physical things he could point to that indicated their hearts were not right with God. This list of things comes from God.

God gives a list of realities they could look at right then and determine we are way off track in our relationship with God: God says take a look at your economic situation. This proves you are not right with me. There are five realities He points out. He has prevented them from accomplishing what they could have accomplished.

(Reality #1) - They have sown much but harvest little. **1:6a**

Their crops weren't producing the way they should. They were living in the Promised Land and should be thriving. Instead they were barely surviving. We are the people of God and we are supposed to be producing. One reason why some of God's people never seem to see God do much of anything is because they are so caught up with themselves and not God.

(Reality #2) - They eat food but don't have enough food. **1:6b**

Here were God's people who didn't have enough food to eat.

(Reality #3) - They drink their wine but don't have enough to become drunk. **1:6c**

They had so little to drink that they could only have a few sips of wine.

(Reality #4) - They wear their clothing, but don't have enough to keep them warm. **1:6d**

Again, these were God's people who barely had enough clothing and didn't have enough clothing to even stay warm.

(Reality #5) - They earn wages, but don't have enough to save anything. **1:6c**

They lived from paycheck to paycheck. They never had enough to pay bills. They had no savings account. They had a life, but it was a lean and futile life.

Now you would naturally think these people of God would say, perhaps I need to analyze my heart and my relationship with God because life is not prospering for me. It was time for these people to observe the fact that God was not showering them with blessings because their focus was wrong.

Self-centeredness that loses a focus on God will never lead to prosperity that is blessed by God. Self-focus and self-interests that leave God out will not bring economic stability to a person's life.

All their economic efforts were suffering because they left God out.

God is able to bless His people. God is able to turn circumstances around. God is able to bless a people physically and economically, but they must examine their hearts.

When Jesus was here on earth, He said to His people, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).

The specific things He mentions in the context are food and drink and clothes. God will bless people who keep Him first in their hearts. That is exactly what Haggai wanted God's people to realize.

God's people need to quit making excuses and take a good honest look at their own hearts.