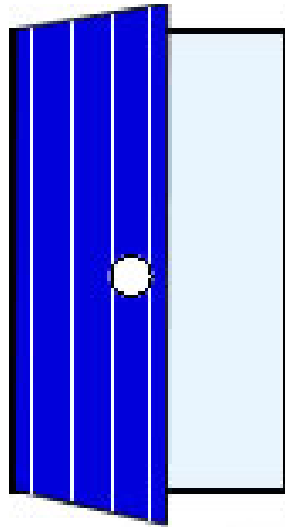


# **BIBLE STUDIES**



**Mill Lane Chapel**

**Haggai**

## **(2) "Consider your ways"**

### **Read Chapter 1: 1-11**

In our introduction, we noticed that the book of Haggai comprises four messages: **(1)** To reprove their idleness, 1: 1-15; **(2)** To restore their confidence, 2: 1-9; **(3)** To rebuke their unholiness, 2: 10-19; **(4)** To reward their leader, 2: 20-23. We must now address the first message, which was

### **1) TO REPROVE THEIR IDLENESS, 1: 1-15**

"Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia", Ezra 4: 24. Unlike the apostles, who faced the prohibition placed upon them with the words, "We ought to obey God rather than men", the Jews meekly accepted the situation. But they certainly didn't sit around and do nothing. Although they were barred from working on the temple, there was no shortage of work elsewhere, and they gladly grasped the opportunity to get on with it! After all, circumstances had changed, and it was obvious, to **them**, that "the time is not come, the time that the **Lord's house** should be built." But **God** did not look at it like that: "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in **your cielel houses**, and **this house** lie waste?", V4. It wasn't as if they turned reluctantly away from the temple: they **ran**, with evident enthusiasm, every man unto **his own house**", V9. They were certainly not "abounding in the work of the **Lord**", 1 Corinthians 15: 58

This chapter therefore centres on the rival claims of God's house and their houses. Notice the references to God's house here: "the Lord's house", V2; "this house", V4; "the house", V8; "mine house", V9; "the house of the Lord of hosts, their God", V14. (See also 2: 3, 7, 9).

There is still such a thing as "the house of God." Unlike the temple, it is not now a material building. It is a building of people! See 1 Timothy 3: 14-15, "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in **the house of God**, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." The "house of God" today is the local church. Even in the Old Testament, the "house of God" was not always a physical building. See Genesis 28: 16-17, "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but **the house of God**, and this is the gate of heaven." The "house of God" is therefore the place where God dwells. At Bethel, there wasn't a building in sight! Today, convenience demands that we meet in halls of various kinds, but if we were obliged to gather in the open air, perhaps to avoid the attention of hostile authorities, we would still be "the house of God", because He is present. Do remember, to quote David Newell, that the local church is 'the people, not the steeple!' We should also remember that the word rendered "church" (*ekklesia*) is

better translated 'assembly.' That is precisely what it means (*ek*, 'out of', and *klesis*, 'a calling'), and how it was used in New Testament times. See, for example, Acts 19: 32, 39, & 41. There is nothing denominational about the word 'assembly!'

Since "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Romans 15: 4), we can expect some lessons from Haggai 1 in connection with our assembly life and our assembly work. This is where **we** should be building. This is where **we** should concentrate our time and energy. But are **we** saying, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built?"

As suggested in our introduction, we will divide Haggai 1 into two sections: **(A)** The reproof, V1-11, and **(B)** The response, V12-15.

### **A) THE REPROOF, V1-11**

We can analyse these verses as follows: **(i)** The address, V1; **(ii)** The admonition, V2-7; **(iii)** The advice, V8; **(iv)** The adversity, V9-11.

#### **i) The address, V1**

**a) We should notice the date.** "In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month." This was approximately sixteen years after the decree of Cyrus permitting the return of the Jews from Babylon (BC 536). It is a striking reminder that because of Israel's sin and idolatry, God had placed the dominion of the world in Gentile hands. See Luke 21: 24, "And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Compare Romans 11: 25. Events in Jewish history are dated here by reference to a Gentile king. But although this was a sharp reminder of better days in the past, it was not an excuse for their current indolence and disinterest.

**b) We should notice the designation.** "In the second year of Darius.....came the word of the Lord by **Haggai the prophet**." (Only Habakkuk and Haggai describe themselves as "the prophet"). Haggai means 'festive', and his ministry anticipates the glorious age of festivity when Israel's Messiah returns to establish His kingdom. See 2: 6-9. The true prophet conveyed the word of God, which he had first received by divine revelation. See, for example, Jeremiah 23: 18 and Amos 3: 7 (Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets"). This reminds us that "if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God", 1 Peter 4: 11. The true prophet was distinguished by the accuracy of his predictions. See Deuteronomy 18: 20-22 and Jeremiah 28: 9.

**c) We should notice the recipients.** They were "Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and.....Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest." These two men were the civil and religious leaders respectively. Zerubbabel (of

royal blood: see 1 Chronicles 3: 19 and Matthew 1: 12-13) was the man in the public eye. Joshua was the man whose ministry took him into the presence of God. This reminds us that we cannot serve in public (our 'princely' character) unless we spend time in God's presence (our 'priestly' character).

The leaders are addressed first. The people are not addressed until the second message: see 2: 2. Leadership incurs and involves heavy responsibility. See, for example, James 3: 1. The two men are mentioned together on five occasions in Haggai (1: 1, 1: 12, 1: 14, 2: 1, 2: 4), and Zerubbabel is always mentioned first, whereas in Ezra 3: 2, Joshua is mentioned first. This emphasises the differing roles of the two leaders. Zerubbabel is named first when the building of the house is mentioned (see also Ezra 5: 2), and Joshua is named first when the building of the altar is mentioned. This illustrates the New Testament lesson that "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given.....to another.....to another", 1 Corinthians 12: 7-11. Each believer has an individual and distinct ministry.

We should notice something else here. Haggai was a prophet, Joshua was a priest, and Zerubbabel was a prince. The Lord Jesus is Prophet, Priest and King. By contrast, Mechizedek was a king and a priest, but he was not a prophet; Samuel was a prophet and a priest, but he was not a king; and David was a king and a prophet, but he was not a priest. The Lord Jesus excels and exceeds them all!

## **ii) The admonition. V2-7**

**a) What they said, V2.** "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." The verse is full of challenging lessons.

Notice the expression, "the Lord of hosts." It emphasises His immense and infinite power. His resources are limitless. The Jews seemed to forget this, and gave up their work for God without recognising his ability to help them.

Notice the expression, "**this** people." Not '**my** people!' They didn't think at all like God's people. (Compare Isaiah 22: God's people had become so much like their neighbours, that God puts them in the 'foreign nations' section of the prophecy!). Their interests took precedence over His interests. They had placed themselves at a distance from Him. There there was a coldness between them and God. Notice that He was completely aware of their conversation, and recited the very things they were saying: "this people say....." Compare Malachi 3: 16.

Notice that **they** made the decisions: "this people say, The time is not come....." **They** had made up **their** minds. But it wasn't up to **them** to decide whether or not to build!

Notice, as well, that they did not say that "the Lord's house" should not be built, but that it was not the appropriate time to build. There was no sense of urgency. This reminds us of the need to "preach the word" and to be "instant (urgent) in season, **out of season**", 2 Timothy 4: 2. After all, if we think about it for too long, we are almost certain to conclude that it just isn't the right time to preach the gospel! (See Ecclesiastes 11: 4, "He that observeth the wind, shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds, shall not reap"). When opposition originally halted the work, it evidently halted interest in the work as well. The reason for inactivity did not lie with antagonism without, but with apathy within. Sadly, this is often the case today! The returning Jews had energetically commenced work for God (see Ezra 3), but interest had waned, and the task remained unfinished. They were in the right place, but that was all. They settled down in the 'place of the Name' (see Deuteronomy 12: 5, 11, 18, 21 etc.), and did nothing further to promote God's interests. But what about **us**? We say that we are in the right place, and that it is good and proper to be in the assembly, but have we just settled down in comfortable inactivity as far as the actual work is concerned? If so, expect the assembly to fossilize, and ultimately disappear without trace.

**b) What God said, V3-7.** He makes two statements, each of which is followed by the words, "Consider your ways." (V2-5, and V6-7). Here is the first statement:

"Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled ('lined', or 'wainscotted', perhaps with cedar: compare Jeremiah 22: 14-15) houses, and this house lie waste?", V2-5. Notice "you....ye....your", V4. Doesn't this remind u0s of Philippians 2: 21, "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." The people did not have time for "the Lord's house" (V2), but they certainly had time for their own houses (V4). It was boom time for the 'do it yourself' shops! When they **said**, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built", they really **meant**, 'we have no time to build the Lord's house.' No wonder God says "now" in 2: 2, 4, 11, 15, 18. They were saying, **"The time is not come"**, and God was saying **"Now!"** We must be people who are "redeeming the time ('buying up the opportunities'), because the days are evil", Ephesians 5: 16. (Also Colossians 4: 5). It can sadly be true of Christians:

Room for pleasure, room for business;  
But for Christ, the crucified,  
Not a place that He can enter,  
In the heart for which He died!

Perhaps God is saying to **you** now: "Consider **your** ways." It will do us no harm to review our attitude to assembly work, and our contribution to assembly building. (The word, "consider", means, 'set your heart on', or, 'give attention': see also 1: 7, and 2: 15 & 18, where the word occurs again). This brings us to the second statement:

"Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." Notice the negatives: "Ye have **not** enough.....ye are **not** filled with drink.....there is **none** warm." So eating, drinking and clothing were all affected. Their disappointment and dissatisfaction were the direct result of their failure to give God's interests priority in their lives. This is specifically stated in V9. But what happens when we **do** put God's interests first? Listen to the Lord Jesus: "Therefore take no thought (anxious thought), saying, what shall we eat? Or, what shall we drink? Or, wherewithal shall we be clothed?.....But seek ye **first** the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; **and all these things shall be added unto you**", Matthew 6: 31-33. (Also V25). The church at Laodicea was, **spiritually**, "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (five things: there were also five things in Haggai 1: 6) for the same reason. They were totally apathetic when it came to God's interests.

For the second time, God says, "Consider your ways." We should give careful attention to our own lives in two ways: we should "consider" what they are like **now**, and we should "consider" what they **should** be like. Israel's self-indulgence was followed by **material** barrenness: our self-indulgence will be followed by **spiritual** barrenness. There was nothing improper about their energy and industry in V6, but God was not given first place, and that made their busy lives unacceptable to Him.

### **iii) The advice, V8**

"Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord." Notice the following:

**a) "Go up to the mountain."** In the first place, it takes effort to climb mountains! But this is where the necessary material was located. Not in the valley, but in the mountain. Let's remember that we will not find the materials that we need for spiritual building, at ground level, with its clamour and distractions. Spiritual materials are found on 'higher ground', in the quiet and solitude of God's presence. We must "go up." In New Testament language, we must "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection (mind) on things above, not on things on the earth", Colossians 3: 1-2. The Lord Jesus "went up into a mountain apart to pray", Matthew 14: 23.

**b) "Bring wood."** This involves hard work and laborious toil. They were not gathering sticks! Trees required felling, trimming, and carrying to the temple site. A variety of skills would have been necessary here, and a variety of gifts are necessary in assembly building. Materials for "the house of God" are only obtained through hard work. To change the figure of speech, "gold, silver, precious (costly) stones" have to be mined or quarried at considerable effort. The durable materials of God's word can only be discovered and used by diligent study and hard work!



It's worth noticing here that this was local work. The "mountain" could not have been too far away. Quite possibly, imported wood was used in the "cieled houses", but it takes a lot more effort to work locally! Local assembly work is most demanding, whether it is spreading the Gospel, or helping God's people.

**c) "Build the house."** Let's remember that the assembly, the "house of God", is "God's building", 1 Corinthians 3: 9. This is **where** we are to build, and we are told **how** we should build there, and **what** should be built there. See 1 Corinthians 3: 10-12.

**d) "And I will take pleasure in it, and will be glorified, saith the Lord."** Would this **really** be true? After all, the second temple was a poor replacement for Solomon's temple! "Who is among you that saw this house in her first glory? And how do ye see it now? Is it not in **your eyes** in comparison of it as nothing?" But however small and unimpressive, work undertaken sacrificially for God, and out of devotion to Him, will bring Him immense joy and pleasure. We must therefore "labour ('make it our aim: 'be ambitious') that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him ('well-pleasing to Him')", 2 Corinthians 5: 9. We must "speak" and "minister" that "God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen", 1 Peter 4: 11.

#### **iv) The adversity, V9-11**

If we give God first place by 'building the house', He will take pleasure in our work and be glorified through it. But if, like the Jews, we "run every man unto his own house", our lives and labour will 'come to little.' These verses explain that **God** will see to it that this happens. "Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, **I** did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And **I** called for a drought upon the land....." The withholding of dew and rain was a sign of divine displeasure. See, for example, Deuteronomy 28: 15-24, 1 Kings 17: 1 etc.

So God deliberately brought adverse conditions into the lives of His people in order to shake them out of their apathy and indifference. Let's put it like this: if our Bible reading (that is, if we **do** read the Bible) is just a chore, and our prayers (that is, if we **do** pray) are quite meaningless, and assembly meetings (that is, if we **do** come) are a dreary routine, then it is a signal that something is desperately wrong. But when we can say with Thomas, **"My** Lord, and **my** God", Bible reading, prayer, fellowship and assembly meetings, will be a sheer delight!

If, on reflection, you discover that God has "called for a drought" in your soul, and there is no spiritual joy, fruit, or progress in your life, turn to Him in confession and repentance. He is longing to say, "From this day will I bless you", 2: 19.

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