



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

Haggai: Rebuilding the Temple
Building Your Life to be Filled by God

Haggai 1:2-9

August 21, 2005

Dr. Matthew J. Hook

INTRO: Temples and synagogues don't often fill the news, but they have this week, with the difficult time in Gaza. What a difficult time! But even the Temple in Jerusalem has had its times of terror and trouble.

There are 3 temples built on the same site there: Solomon's, Zerubbabel's, and Herod's, all on Mt. Moriah. Solomon's contained the outer court, the inner court, the holy place, and the holy of holies. The king of Egypt stole the temple treasures during the reign of Rehoboam. Judah's king Asa used the Temple treasure to buy allies and buy off invaders. King Manasseh placed Canaanite altars in the temple. King Ahaz brought in an altar patterned after one he saw in Damascus. About 640B.C. good king Josiah had to repair the Temple. But then, in 587B.C. Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar looted, sacked, and burned the Temple.

It's amazing this week we are studying Haggai. The message is don't stop rebuilding the Temple. The Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem and build a new temple. The new Temple was finished about 515BC. It was small and inferior to Solomon's (Ezra 3:12). The ark of the covenant was never recovered. This Temple stood until 167BC when Antiochus defiled the altar and looted it. The Maccabees cleansed the Temple and turned it into a fortress. (164BC).

Herod the Great sought to appease the Jews by constructing a new ornate Temple in 19BC. The main building was completed in 9BC, but the whole thing wasn't completed until 64AD, only to be destroyed by the Romans in 70AD.

And we thought building this sanctuary was trouble! And in the midst of all that, the Psalmist sings "I will enter his gates with thanksgiving in my heart, I will enter his courts with praise! I will say this is the day that the Lord has made, I will rejoice for he has made me glad!" (100:4)

* * * * *

They'd stalled out... It was like the building program and debt got swallowed up in the daily operations budget, and the project was too big. Sound familiar? Have you ever wondered what it is that keeps us from doing what we know we could do?

This is the situation that God called Haggai to address. The rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. After Solomon died, the nation of Israel became 2: Israel in the north, Judah in the south. Jerusalem is in Judah. Because they abandoned God, the 10 tribes of Israel were captured by the Assyrians and scattered. Later, Judah was taken by the Babylonians, and Jerusalem was destroyed, Temple and all, as devastating as the Holocaust. The people were in exile for 70 years. Then Persia took over Babylon and King Cyrus of Persia

allowed the Jews in Babylon to return. Only a remnant did. They returned to Jerusalem and began to rebuild the Temple. They quickly stalled out. God calls Haggai to speak to those back in Jerusalem. Here these words from Haggai 1:2-9: 2 *This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.'"* 3 *Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: 4 "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"* 5 *Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. 6 You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."* 7 *This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. 8 Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the LORD.* 9 *"You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house.*

The book of Haggai is a word to you to keep your eye on the big picture: When you perceive what's most important, your work is half done. Haggai put first things first. And the people responded, and God's Temple was rebuilt. His single task, carried out in 3 ½ months, was to get God's people to work at rebuilding God's Temple (the same Temple that had been destroyed only 70 years earlier). He basically said "You've treated God and his Temple with stinginess. God has matched the tight-fisted stinginess of the people by decreeing a season of drought, drying up fields and hills, withering gardens and orchards, stunting vegetables and fruit. Nothing—no man or woman, not animal or crop—is going to thrive."

When we are seeking to build God's Temple, we will run into obstacles: those who are waiting "for God's timing", those who spend their time focusing on themselves and their *own* riches, those who think we don't have enough resources, those who think the times are too hard, those who think we just can't get any better than we once were, those who think by being in the presence of the Temple makes them above base sin, those who can't see God's vision for the future. Listen to the people's complaints with God's replies, and see if they don't fit any you have today: The people complained:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. The time is not right. | 1. If it's on your heart and in my will, act now. |
| 2. The job is too big. | 2. The job is Mine; let's work together. |
| 3. The resources are too small. | 3. I am your Source; I own all the resources. |
| 4. What we build will not be as great as the past. | 4. What you build, I will fill with My glory. Plenty! |

Let's go deeper. Have you ever wondered what it is that keeps us from doing what we know we could do? What is it that keeps us paralyzed when it comes to faith issues? Heck—what holds us down in daily life issues?

Is it fear? Is it laziness? Is it the comfort of our "stuff?" Is it convenience? We've engorged media that tells us we're basically consumers, spectators, and *supposed* to focus on our selves. Is it neurosis—avoiding the pain of life? Is it putting play before work? Is it—SATAN? Satan wants to destroy the Temple of God. Satan wants to destroy the work and evidence of God. Well, yes. One of Satan's most silent, most deadly weapons: discouragement.

Discouragement comes easily to us when we do the work of God. *Discouragement is very natural.* Doubt and discouragement are *the* most natural responses to life? It's *belief* that is supernatural. *Faith* only comes from the Spirit of God; *Doubt* is natural to *all* of us! So, if you're here and you have doubts, realize how natural and normal your doubts are. The people of Israel doubted all the time. The disciples doubted Jesus too.

I doubted God. I used to think I could do nothing for God because I was a white suburban kid from the suburbs. And I know that goes for some of you too, and because you think you can't do much to make a

difference, you've resolved to do nothing! What's more, we start comparing. We think we are doing so little as compared with other people, so we give up. We can't build a temple like Solomon, or preach like Billy Graham, so we won't build at all. The truth is *nothing* we can do is worthy of God. What human work can be worthy of the Lord? The small things you and I can do are just as insignificant as the big things that others can do when we compare them to God, so relax! Use your gifts to God anyway, and see what He does with them!

Discouragement is very common. Discouragement has caused great evil and prevented great good in the world! Discouragement is the national epidemic of Israel and of us today. *Discouragement weakens you.* Haggai says three times to the governor, high priest, and people, "*Be strong.*" Faith opens us up to the omnipotence of God, but unbelief closes the door of God's possibilities. Distrust enslaves you to your circumstances. Faith gives you courage.

Discouragement not only weakens you, but *it takes you away from the service of God.* It is significant that Haggai said to them, "*Be strong, declares the Lord, and work.*" They had stopped building. When we're discouraged, we cease from the work of the Lord, and we waste time in talk. Just this week, discouragement crept over my heart and work was much more of a struggle. "*Be strong; be strong; be strong,*" may be God's voice to you today. "*Fear not,*" God says.

In business terms, Haggai knew he must keep the vision clear. Solomon wrote "*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*" Lives are lost when there is no greater vision before them. Dreams of doing great things for God die. Shoulders sag. People become restless and irritable. They begin quarreling among themselves and they revert to nothing more than spending money on themselves. The Israelites were in danger of not taking worship of God seriously. With out vision, peoples gifts atrophy, and their hearts go for other stuff, (usually just stuff!), and it's always much less than God's best for our world. Haggai called them and calls us to the God-honoring cause of rebuilding the Temple.

They needed a target to stay in the game. Haggai shared and shaped the vision so that they would indeed complete the Temple. Their faith was stretched and people were once again brought back to God's purpose for their lives—to be His people, continuing His mission. He prophesied that "*The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house.*" How many times have people missed out in joining us here because we said "no" for them? From this moment on, let's make sure no one else misses out because we're not in the game. I want you to hear the testimony of one young man, Paul Cynar, who is here because another young man had his head in the game. PAUL CYNAR

God is calling all us exiles home. Haggai knew he must get the people engaged. And he did: "*Zerubbabel the prince, Joshua the high priest, and the whole remnant obeyed the voice of the Lord their God...the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the spirit o the whole remnant. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty.*"

In business terms, Haggai created ownership. The remnant of Judah became stake-holders, buying in to the vision. They pulled together. It was something to lay down their lives for, even though the challenge was big. This wasn't a safe, sanitized mission. It was dangerous. But, there are some blessings that can come only from a life centered on God.

At the beginning of worship, I said how there were 3 versions of the Temple over the centuries. But the truth is there are more. While they were in Babylon, God gave Ezekiel a vision for the Temple (47:1-12), from which the river flows out in every direction "*and wherever the river flows, life will flourish.*"

Jesus taught that that church is the new temple (Matt.16:18, 18:19-20, John 14:23), and at the moment of Jesus' death, the Temple veil was torn from top to bottom. By His death, Jesus opened a new way into the presence of God. No longer was the Temple in Jerusalem to be the place where people worshiped God. From now on they would worship him in "*spirit and in truth*...and from their hearts will flow rivers of living water" (John 4:21-24, 7:38).

You and I are "*the Temple of the Holy Spirit*" (1 Cor. 6:19). The Holy Spirit descended upon the believers at Pentecost, and He has never gone back again: there is no record of the Spirit's return to heaven. He will abide with the true church evermore. This is our hope for the present struggle. The Spirit of God remains with us.

Be encouraged! Satan is always doing his utmost to quash the work of God. He hindered these Jews from building the temple; and to-day he tries to hinder the people of God from spreading the gospel. If he can take us off from working with faith and courage for the glory of God he will be sure to do it.

In a day of some darkness, Haggai gives us a word of rising up and acting now. Build now. Do not wait. The work of God needs to be done now. Not next year. Not ten years from now. Now. Are your homes open? Are your lives ready? People thirst for the river of life, flowing from the temple of your heart. Your heart can be the temple of His Spirit! Opportunities exist today like never before.

What could be bigger than Solomon's Great Temple? If every person took the temple with them in their hearts and spread throughout the earth, healing, leading, and teaching in the name of God, bringing the worship of God to the whole earth. Let us go in the name of Christ as His Temple here on earth. Amen.