

The Principles, Promises, and Pitfalls of National Restoration

Builders for Eternity: The Book of Haggai

Introduction

1. Historical Background: Two great prophecies fulfilled.
 - a. Prophecy of Cyrus (Isa. 44:28–45:7). Rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1:1–4).
 - b. Prophecy of Artaxerxes (Dan. 9:25). Rebuild the City (Neh. 2:1–8). This was the “command” that started the prophetic clock ticking down the 69 “weeks,” or 483 years, to the Messiah’s first coming.
2. From the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., we are historically in “*the times of the Gentiles*” (Daniel 2; Luke 21:24).
3. Temple foundation is laid (Ezra 3:10-12); work stopped (Ezra 4:24).
4. Haggai and Zechariah were contemporaries (Ezra 5:1–2; 6:14). Where Zechariah was a visionary, Haggai is the prophet of the practical life of faith. As Chuck Missler said, “he puts theology in shoe-leather.”
5. Haggai includes four messages, given in seven paragraphs:
 - a. Message to Zerubbabel and Joshua: Chapter 1 (First three paragraphs).
 - b. Message to the Remnant: 2:1–9 (fourth).
 - c. Message to the Priests: 2:10–19 (fifth and sixth).
 - d. Message to Zerubbabel: 2:20–23. (seventh).

We will study the book by focusing on each paragraph, as the goal of the paragraph is to set forth a single, dominant idea. Each paragraph will present us with a question that should cause us to examine our own souls.

6. “*Haggai ... is preeminently the prophet of exhortation. The truth is that few prophets have succeeded in packing into such brief compass so much spiritual common sense as Haggai did*” (Dr. Constable’s *Expository Notes on Haggai*, 2025 Edition, p. 9). The book compares in many ways to the book of James.

Study Method

In 1986, or thereabouts, I was at a Pastor’s conference in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in the church of Pastor Bill Pauley. One of the speakers was Dr. William Leuck (pronounced “Luck”). During one of the question-and-answer sessions, he was asked to recommend a study method for the attending pastors. His answer was very simple, but eminently practical:

1. Passage—Analyze in its context (biblical, historical, doctrinal).
2. Principle—Identify and illustrate the main truth.

“Principles are eternal, and like good soldiers, they stand fast.”
—Thomas Carlyle

3. Practice—Apply the lesson to the believer’s daily life. This is the methodology we will use for this study.

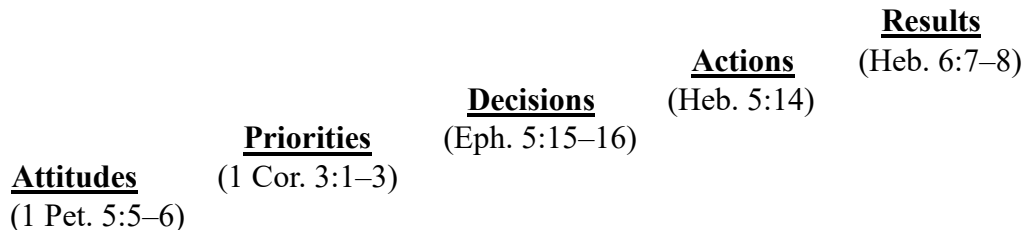
I. The First Message: To the Leaders—Rebuke, Correction, Instruction **(Chapter 1)**

“All Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable to doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be mature, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16–17

“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” Romans 15:4

Paragraph One: A Problem of Priorities **Haggai 1:1–6**

Our priorities are like a compass: they point the way we want to go. Priorities reveal the focus of the heart and anticipate future decisions and actions. Since the word “edify” literally means to “build a house,” let’s think of priorities as the “steps” involved in building:



The two fundamental and contrasting attitudes are **humility** or **pride** (arrogance). Based on which we choose, our priorities will either be **spiritual** or **carnal**. Our priorities will guide our decisions, which will be either **wise** or **foolish**. From our decisions come actions, which are either **good** or **evil**. At this point the die is set, and the consequential results will be either **blessing** or **cursing**. Remember that as the Bible defines cursing, it is God allowing men to “reap what they have sown” (Gal. 6:7; Rom. 1:24, 26, 28).

The Passage

1. Verse 1: The leaders (Zerubbabel, Joshua) are responsible for the people! The phrase, “*The word of the LORD came*” occurs 27 times in this short book!
2. Verse 2: They started well (Ezra 3:8–11) but became spiritually sluggish—carnally minded. God says, “*this people*”—not “My people.” Sin and disobedience always distance us from God. They had laid the foundation but failed to build on it

(1 Cor. 3:10–11). This is the sad story of many Christian lives—they are foundations without the houses!

3. Verses 3–4: They considered that the time was right to build fine (“paneled” = “finely finished”) houses for themselves (Jer. 22:13–14), but that *“the time has not come that the LORD’S house should be built”* (v. 2) Consider the contrast in David’s attitude in 2 Samuel 7:1–2.
4. Verses 5–6: “Consider” is the key word of book (found 5x), literally, “set your heart on.” This is a *qal* imperative—a simple command. This command shows that their problem was a heart problem, an issue that will become clearer in 2:10–14. Haggai’s theology is built on the blessing vs. cursing promises of the covenant (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28).

The Principle

The leaders failed to connect their misplaced priorities to the resulting disciplinary action from God. We are warned in Hebrews 12:3–5 that failure to respond positively to divine discipline will only bring greater discipline.

In 2 Kings 5, there is a valuable lesson on both perspectives and priorities. Naaman, the commander of the armies of Syria, comes to Elisha for healing from his leprosy. The prophet’s instruction to go and wash seven times in the Jordan seems ludicrous to Naaman, who assumes that the issue is whether the waters of the Jordan are better than the rivers of Damascus. The real issue was whether he would act in obedient faith. His perspective was carnal, when it needed to be spiritual.

Then we have Gehazi, the servant of Elisha. In those days, the prophet’s servant was a favored “son of the prophets,” a prophet in training, as Elisha had been to Elijah (2 Kings 3:11). Elisha would take no payment for Naaman’s healing. But after he had gone, Gehazi ran after him, lied that he was sent by Elisha, and asked for clothing and silver. As a result of his misplaced priorities, he suffered the leprosy that had afflicted Naaman.

The Practice

As was mentioned above, our priorities are either spiritual or carnal. These are the direct result of our attitude, the condition of the heart.

Q: Where is your heart set? (Matt. 6:21; 33)

Jesus was always seeking the condition of the heart, for that is where all the issues of life begin (Prov. 4:23).

The Doctrine of the Heart

1. The unregenerate heart is the source of all evil (Jer. 9:9), and no unsaved person can fathom its depths of evil.
2. Only God is able to search and know what is in the human heart (Jer. 17:10; Acts 15:8).
3. At the moment of the new birth, God gives us a new heart to know and serve Him (Ezek. 11:19–20; 36:26; Heb. 8:10; 10:16).
4. This new heart is to be a stronghold and a bulwark against all the evil of the “old man” and the sinful nature (Prov. 4:23; 2 Cor. 10:36).
5. The regenerate heart requires constant strengthening from the Word and the Spirit of God (Eph. 1:18; Heb. 13:9).
6. The content of our speech reveals the hidden condition of the heart (Matt. 12:34; Luke 6:45; James 3:1–12).
7. In Scripture, the idea of a “single heart,” is that of undivided focus on the Lord and His will (Matt. 6:22; Luke 11:34; Acts 2:46; Col. 3:22)

Paragraph Two: The Command and the Consequences

Haggai 1: 1:7–11

How often do we fail to connect our conduct with the consequences of it. In vv. 7–8, we have the true heart of the book. Haggai calls them to self-examination and correction.

The Passage

1. Verses 7–8: “*Consider ... Go ... bring ... build*” (three-component command). Once again, he questions their heart-focus. “Consider” in the Hebrew is “set your heart on.” A revived heart will result in “going ... bringing ... and building” the Temple. The results are seen in the phrase, “*that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified.*” Both of the verbs here are in the *niphal* stem, showing God to be the recipient of their work and their worship.

Point: We must never forget that true worship involves sacrifice as well as service (Gen. 22:5; Rom. 12:1–2).

“Those who wait to give to God until they have enough for themselves, will never have enough for themselves.” –Anonymous

2. Verses 9–11: God again reminds them that He is the author of discipline, as Moses warned in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. “*I blew it away ... I called for a drought.*”

The Principle

Disobedience to God brings discipline from God. What work has God called us to that we have left undone? Do we ever consider that our spiritual drought is the result of our spiritual lethargy?

Q: How often do we “consider” our three-component command?

“Go ... make disciples ... baptizing ... teaching” (Matt. 28:18–20). Which one is the command? Most people say “Go,” but the command is “make disciples.” How do we do this?

- 1) We “keep on going” with the Gospel message,
- 2) We “keep on baptizing” those who believe, and
- 3) We “keep on teaching” new believers. This is what makes disciples!

Consider the contrast between Peter in Acts 10 and Paul in Acts 16. Remember that Peter was present when Jesus gave the command:

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
Acts 1:8

Peter, in Acts 10:9 and following, begins by being preoccupied with a desire for something to eat. He is the guest in the house of Simon and is comfortable and safe. But his focus is on his own desire for something to eat.

Now, God uses his hunger to confront him with a vision that reveals his supposed obedience is really disobedience. God commands him to “rise and eat,” and his response is “No, Lord.” He is hungry for food; God is hungering for precious souls! He considers Gentiles unclean, but God considers them priceless treasures. Being rebuked and corrected he goes to the house of Cornelius and reaps a great spiritual harvest.

Paul, along with Silas, is in the Philippian jail. They have been beaten and left in painful stocks (often these locked the wrists near the ankles). They have not eaten, are now filthy and sore—yet they are singing praises to God. The outcome is again a great spiritual harvest.

At the end of his life, Paul was able to echo the final words of His Master, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30), “*I have finished the race*” (2 Tim. 4:7).

The Practice

The Word of God makes it clear that every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is sealed and indwelt by the Spirit (That is Power!). Every believer is given a spiritual gift/gifts (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:4–7), and to each, a work to accomplish (Mark 13:34)—each according to his ability (Matt. 25:15).

The discovery of our gift and its attending work is the result of making a definite self-presentation to God for service (Rom. 12:1–2). Our ability to finish the work committed to us is dependent on spiritual cleansing (2 Tim. 2:20–21) and on the filling and control of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

The Doctrine of Faithful Men

1. It is God’s unwavering faithfulness that calls us to have faith in Him (Deut. 7:9; 1 Cor. 1:9, 10:13; 1 Thess. 5:24; Rev. 19:11).
2. Faith in a God who is faithful reproduces His character in men who are faithful (Num. 12:7; 1 Sam. 22:14; Col. 1:7; 4:9; Heb. 3:2).
3. Faithful men believe and apply the Word of God to daily life (Matt. 24:45–47; Luke 12:42–44; Titus 1:9).
4. Faithful men are drawn to other faithful men, who reproduce themselves in still more faithful men (2 Tim. 2:2).
5. God gives special protection to faithful men (Psalm 31:23; Prov. 28:20).
6. Nations fail when faithful men cannot be found (Psalm 12:1–8).
7. God searches the Earth to identify and to reward faithful men (2 Chron. 16:9; Ezek. 9:4; Mal. 3:16–17; Hag. 2:23).

Paragraph Three: The Power and Blessing of Obedience **Haggai 1:12–15**

The people had assumed that by returning to the land, rebuilding the altar (Ezra 3:1–6), and offering sacrifices, that God was obligated to bless them. However, partial obedience is really disobedience.

The Passage

1. Verse 12: Obedience comes from faith, and faith comes “from hearing the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17). As obedience to the Lord is a manifestation of reverence, so *“The fear [reverence] of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom ...”* (Prov. 9:10).

The leaders accepted Haggai's message as the Word of God, and this was the beginning of a revival that would not be complete until Haggai 2:15–23.

“This was the beginning of a conversion. In this one thing they began to do, what, all along, in their history, and most in their decay before the captivity they refused to do—obey God's word.” (Constable's Notes on Haggai).

2. Verses 13–14: God is with those who choose to stand with Him. Who is “*on the Lord's side*” (Exod. 32:26)? The Levites! Formerly under a curse (Gen. 49:5–7), they now enter into blessing. Here, we see that obedience leads to reverence, and reverence to the promise of the Lord's presence, and the stirring up (*uhr* —*hiphil* stem, causative active) by the Holy Spirit. God is a God of order and of cause and effect. The same order is seen in Jesus' promise in John 15:7–11.
3. Verse 15: “*On the twenty-fourth day.*” The 23-day delay from v. 1 may be explained by 1) the time taken to gather the wood from the mountains (v. 7), and also 2) this was the time of the harvest of figs and grapes.

The Principle

“To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22). King Saul is the great historical example of half-hearted obedience. His repeated failure in this area cost him the kingdom (1 Sam. 13:13–14; 15:26). Right conduct comes from right motivation. Right motivation comes from right thinking. Genuinely right thinking can only result from “*the renewing of your mind*” (Rom. 12:1–2)—by consistent learning of the Word of God.

In Romans 6:17, the Apostle Paul thanks God for the Roman believers, who “*obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.*” The focus on the heart implies an intellectual, volitional, emotional and motivational response. In other words, they heard, they believed, they embraced, and they acted on the truth they learned. It is worth highlighting that they were delivered to the doctrine, not the doctrine to them. From being slaves to sin, they became servants of God.

Q: What is it that motivates you?

Our word, “enthusiasm” comes from two Greek words: *en* (in) and *theos* (God). True enthusiasm is the power of the Spirit of God at work within. In Ephesians 1:19–20, there are four words of power that Paul relates to the resurrection of Jesus Christ (*dunamis*, *energeo*, *kratos*, and *ischuos*). He argues that these powers are at work in those who are “*being enlightened*” in the Word of God (vv. 17–18).

This remnant to which Haggai preached would have to learn that actions alone were not sufficient to enter into God's blessings (Hag. 2:10–14). For God searches the hearts (Jer. 17:9–10), and the work is not right unless the motives are pure.

The Practice

In one of the most vital passages as it relates to the work of the Great Commission (2 Cor. 5:14–21), Paul brings together all facets of the above principle. The love of Christ provides the motivation, which leads to the action of living for Him and not self. This results in a new perspective toward all men, providing an opening for witness, with a clear and simple, yet powerful message of the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Purity of motive comes from clarity of biblical understanding. We cannot be double-minded (James 1:6–8), whether in praying or in serving. As Jesus said to the disciples, *“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light”* (Matt. 6:22 KJV). The word *“single”* here is from *haploos*, and means “pure, single, unmixed.” It is the exact opposite of being “double-minded.”

The Doctrine of Blessing

1. The first promise of the book is found in 1:13, *“I am with you, says the Lord.”* This is the source and assurance of all blessing.
2. In 2:4–5, God explains that His Spirit had remained among them since the days of the Exodus.
3. We see then the truth that *“If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself”* (2 Tim. 2:13).
4. The essence of this promise is seen in Hebrews 13:5–6, *“For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”* So that we may boldly say: *“The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”*
5. This being true, why do so many believers lack a sense and an assurance of the abiding presence of the Lord? It is because, though He will never leave us, we do often depart from Him. *“Behold, the LORD’S arm is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear”* (Isa. 59:1–2).
6. The principle is clear, there can be no consciousness of blessing when we are not in a right relation to God, in faith and obedience.
7. Paul tells us, in Ephesians 1:3, that every believer is the recipient of *“every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ”*. This is ours, *“according to the riches of His grace”* (Eph. 1:7). In Ephesians 3:8, he refers to *“the unsearchable riches of Christ.”* Our problem is not the lack of God’s blessings; it is the poverty of soul that does not value and appreciate them.
8. The love of Christ is infinite and unfathomable and eternal. Jesus said, *“abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s*

commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:9b–10). All true blessing comes from the conscious presence and fellowship of the Lord Jesus (John 15:5).

II. The Second Message—To the Whole Remnant (Chapter 2:1–9)

Paragraph Four: The Limitation of Carnal Perspective **Haggai 2:1–9**

Too often, our potential is limited because of our perspective. We all often say, “Look up!” in the light of Colossians 3:1–4. Sometimes, we need to look down, from our position of being seated with Christ (Eph. 2:6). Things look very different when seen from a heavenly perspective!

Carnal perspectives limit the working of God’s power in our lives. In 1 Corinthians 2:6–10, Paul argued for the magnificence of what God was accomplishing through his ministry. Then, in 1 Corinthians 3:1–4, he rebukes the Corinthians, whose carnal perspectives limited them to only receiving a small portion of what was available.

Again, in Hebrews 5:9–14, he contrasts the greatness of his message about Jesus Christ our High Priest, to their limited capacity to understand and enjoy the benefits of His power. How important is our perspective, whether spiritual or carnal? Eagles look to the horizon; turkeys look at the ground!

The Passage

1. Verses 1–3: “*In the seventh month, on the twenty first of the month.*” This was October 17, 520 B.C. Solomon had dedicated the original temple during this festival (1 Kings 8:2; 2 Chron. 7:8–10). “How is it in your eyes?” We read in Ezra 3:12, how the old men, 16 years earlier, who had seen Solomon’s Temple, wept at the small size of the restored temple. Permit me to ask, “How does the work God has you doing look in your eyes?”
2. Verse 4: “*Be strong [3x] ...and work; for I am with you.*” Paul asks rhetorically in Romans 8:31, “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*” Strength for service does not come from “feeling” God’s presence, it comes from believing His promise that He is (Heb. 13:5–6). The word “*strong*” here comes from *chazak*, and includes ideas of hardness, toughness, strength, stability, steadfastness, resilience.
3. Verse 5: This verse shows that they are spiritually linked to God’s past victories. The same God who led them out of Egypt has now led them out of Babylon! After nearly a thousand years, His promises and His power remain the same.

Point: Just as this small remnant is spiritually linked to their past, so also, they are linked to the future glory God will share with them (2:6–9).

4. Verses 6–9: Verse 6 is the only verse of Haggai quoted in the New Testament (Heb. 12:26). It refers to His mighty works in the Exodus and at Sinai

(Constable's Notes). The phrase, "*The Desire of All nations*" has Messianic focus and was so understood by ancient Jews as well as the early Church. However, some translate this as "the wealth of the nations," in the form of tribute. Interestingly, the Septuagint (LXX) says "The elect of all the nations will come." What God will do with this small work will be glorious!

The Principle

No work or service offered to God from pure hands and hearts is small or insignificant. The true value of such offerings will not be seen until eternity. Note that this promise does not relate to the Millennial Temple, but rather, "*I will fill this temple with glory*" (v. 7).

Even though Herod vastly expanded Zerubbabel's temple, it was still known as "the second temple." And true to God's Word, this temple was indeed filled with the very essence of glory and peace! On the day that Joseph and Mary brought the infant Jesus to the Temple, there was one there who had the spiritual perspective to see what God had done.

"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before in the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." Luke 2:29–32

Zechariah, the contemporary of Haggai, had something to say about the contrast of carnal vs. spiritual perspectives (Read: Zech. 4:6–10). How often God takes what man despises and does His mightiest works with those frail instruments (1 Cor. 1:26–31)!

Small Things

Shamgar had an ox goad
David had a sling,
Dorcas had a needle,
And Rahab had some string.

Mary had some ointment,
Moses had a rod.
What small things do you have,
You'll dedicate to God?

—Author Unknown

The Practice

The great danger of carnal perspectives is illustrated by Jesus in His parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–29). The whole point is that it is not the number of talents, nor the size of the ministry, but rather the faithfulness in its use that counts for eternity.

Q: Is your talent too small? Are you a one-talent Christian?

A “one talent Christian” is not someone whose gifts or calling are insignificant, but rather one who thinks that they are. Remember that each believer is given his/her own work (Mark 13:34), and it is given according to their ability (Matt. 25:15). God perfectly matches each of us, not only regarding our spiritual gifts, but our personality and life experiences—all of which prepares us for our calling in Christ.

Every believer is equal in our standing in Christ, and we all share in all spiritual blessings available to the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:3, 18; 2:7; 3:8, 10).

The Doctrine of the Holiness of Insignificance

1. From beginning to end, the Bible is a story of the holiness of little things. While fallen mankind magnifies and glorifies the big, the powerful, and the glamorous, God has chosen to glorify the small, the weak, and the common. From the jawbone of an ass (Judg. 15:15–16), to the sling of David (1 Sam. 17:40), to an infant in a feed trough (Luke 2:7), the story is always the same. And the abiding principle behind it all is this: the only way up in God’s economy is down!
2. First, we need to begin by defining what is meant by “holiness.” God alone is holy in nature and character. The essence of God defines holiness. Beyond this, all things are holy only as they reflect the nature of God or serve to fulfill the plan of God.
3. Holiness means separation from all that is sinful and impure, but it is more than this. It speaks of wholeness and spiritual health.
4. In Haggai, the people needed to learn that good works do not make one holy, nor does size and magnificence (i.e. the Temple) reflect the glory of God. Glory is the manifestation of God’s essence. And though some wept at the smallness of the Second Temple (Ezra 3:12–13; Hag. 2:3–7), God declared that He would fill it with greater glory than that of Solomon’s Temple.
5. In Matthew 12:42, Jesus declared, *“The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.”* He defied the Pharisees love of the big, the beautiful, and the impressive. He whom God sent for the salvation of the world, came *“gentle and lowly in heart”* (Matt. 11:29) and with *“nowhere to lay His head”* (Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58).
6. God chose the birthplace of the Savior to be in little Bethlehem. *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from old, from everlasting.”* (Micah 5:2).
7. Jesus grew up in a backwater village called Nazareth, which gave rise to the proverb, *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* (John 1:46). How often our God chooses the gutter to bring forth His glory!

8. As if all this insignificance was not enough, the Apostle Paul gives us a chronicle of Jesus' downward journey from the throne of God, down to manhood, and then to the humiliation of the cross of a common criminal (Phil. 2:5–10). This story is the ultimate expression of the holiness of God in the small and insignificant.
9. Throughout the Bible, the holiness, power, and glory of God is seen at work through the small, the insignificant, and the despised. When God commands, "*Be holy for I am holy*" (Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:17), He also adds, "*for I am the Lord who sanctifies you*" (Lev. 20:8).
10. Amazingly, the process of sanctification always and only begins in the place of smallness and obscurity. Let all who seek after the holiness of God begin their search in the place of smallness and obscurity, for only from there will He lift you up (Luke 14:10; James 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:5–6).
 - a. "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matt. 5:3).
 - b. "*Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matt. 18:3).
 - c. "*But God has chosen the foolish things of the world ... and God has chosen the weak things of the world ... and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not [nothing] ... that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you [believers] are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption*" (1 Cor. 1:27–30).
 - d. The great lesson from all the above is this: devote your heart to God, with all your imperfections. Then hide yourself in obscurity, until God sees fit to bring you out into the light as His instrument, for His purpose, at the right time.

III. The Third Message—To the Priests (Chapter 2:10–19)

Of all the people in the remnant, **the priests** should have known the importance of two things: purity and time! They were to be the experts in interpreting and teaching the law.

Paragraph Five: A Question of Purity **Haggai 2:10–14**

Today the issue of spiritual purity is seldom emphasized, and when it is, the definition is distorted and slanted in one way or another. It is so easy to accommodate our own predilections and preferences in place of what Scripture defines as holy. Here, God confronts the people, through questions raised by the prophet Haggai, to realize that while they thought they were "good to go" spiritually, they were in reality defiled.

The Passage

1. Verses 10–13: These questions are rightly directed to the priests, who were to be the experts and teachers of the law (Mal. 2:7). The questions posed by Haggai are based on Leviticus 6:18, 25; 22:4–6 and Numbers 6:20; 19:11–16.
2. Verse 14: Up to now, the nation had been suffering for their impurity. The national judgment announced by Jeremiah had to run its full course (Jer. 25:11–12; 29:10). The people seem to have gotten the idea that by rebuilding the altar and offering sacrifices, they were cleansed. But God is looking into their hearts and finds a great deal of impurity (Jer. 17:9–10).

The Principle

These questions show that while purity cannot be transmitted by contact, impurity can (1 Cor. 5:6). As others have noted, dirty water can defile clean water, but clean water cannot purify dirty water. Also, while a sick person can transmit their sickness, a healthy person cannot make sick people well (Constable's notes).

Jesus dealt with this issue in Matthew 23:23–28. The Pharisees were experts at putting on a good show, but in their hearts, they were far from God, for they lacked humility and purity of heart. There is supreme irony in Jesus' use of "*whitewashed tombs*." During the feasts, when multitudes gathered in Jerusalem, all burial sites were whitewashed, lest any pilgrims should inadvertently walk on a funeral site and defile themselves. In essence, Jesus was telling the multitudes to avoid defiling themselves by association with the Pharisees (Matt. 16:6)!

The Practice

Q: Is your vessel clean (2 Tim. 2:20–21)?

As Jesus instructed the disciples in the Upper Room, holiness before God requires constant cleansing. We live in a defiled world, and the sewage of it is constantly rubbing off on us. What Paul teaches in the above passage from Timothy reminds us that it is the content, not the outside of the vessel, that determines its honorable status. Three levels of cleansing need to be kept constantly in mind.

Three Washings of the Believer

1. The once-for-all washing of salvation (Isa. 1:18; John 13:10; Heb. 9:14, 22).
2. The moment-by-moment washing of confession (Psalm 32:5–6; John 13:8; 1 John 1:9).
3. The gradual washing of consistent obedience to the word of God (1 John 1:7; Eph. 5:26).

Paragraph Six: The Importance of Time **Haggai 2:15–19**

The Passage

“This is the day the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it.” Psalm 118:24

1. Verses 15–18: *“Consider ... from this day”* (3x). Why this particular day? From the day that Jerusalem fell (586 B.C., Ezek. 24:1–2) to this day, ends the full 70 years of captivity—to the very day! God revealed to Ezekiel, while he was in Babylon, the exact day that the siege of Jerusalem began (Ezek. 24:1–2). This exact day was also recorded by Jeremiah, who was in Jerusalem (Jer. 52:4). From that day to this, is exactly 25,200 days, or exactly 70 years of 360 days each!
2. Verse 19: *“From this day I will bless you”* (the *piel* of *barack* = richly bless!). The use of the intensive stem implies rich and abundant blessing.

Note: Four out of the seven paragraphs in this book remind the remnant that they have been under the just discipline of God for their sins.

The Principle

One of man’s greatest limitations is time. Yet, within this constraint, the timing of God is always perfect. God created mankind within certain boundaries.

“God, who made the world and everything in it ... has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” Acts 17:24–27

The “*boundaries*” Paul speaks of are not geographical, but rather speak of the limitations of time, space, matter, and intellect—beyond which the natural man cannot go.

In Psalm 55:4–8, David, in great anguish, longs to be set free from his human limitations, so as to *“fly away and be at rest.”* Again, in Psalm 139:7–12, he imagines escaping from time, space, and matter—only to find that God, who has no such limitation, would still be with him.

The Practice

Q: Do you know what day it is?

This question is often asked in jest when someone seems to be clueless about something. However, in the spiritual realm it is a crucial issue. How often believers quote, *“This is the day the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it.”* (Psalm 118:24) and yet do not even know

the day being spoken of in the text. It refers specifically to the day of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, in anticipation of the crucifixion (look carefully at vv. 24–28).

In Titus 2:11–13, Paul encapsulates the experience of the believer in three days:

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men [the past], teaching us [the present] that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ [the future] ...”

These verses indicate the importance of time-orientation for the believer. There are many who live in the past, or dream of the future, to the detriment of their life in the present. How we need to orient to time!

The Doctrine of Time

1. The Bible is clear that in God’s sovereign rule of all things, one of the most critical elements of that rulership relates to His control of time (Gen. 18:14; 21:2; Exod. 9:5; Mark 1:15; Acts 7:17; Eph. 1:10).
2. We are reminded in Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 that every facet of human existence is not only bounded by time but also has its own allotment in time.
3. One of the greatest concepts to come from the brilliant and inspired mind of the Apostle Paul is that of redeeming the time (Eph. 5:15–16; Col. 4:5).
4. The concept of redeeming time teaches us that while God supervises time from the outside, we who believe have been granted the awesome privilege of working together with God from within time.
5. Every day gives us 24 hours, 1440 minutes, and 86,400 seconds. Each moment can be claimed by the believer for eternity. As Maximus said, in the movie *Gladiator*, “*What we do in time echoes in eternity.*”
6. However, Paul makes it clear, in the context of this challenge that redeeming time is possible only when the believer is in fellowship with God and walking in obedience.

“See then that you walk circumspectly [carefully], not as fools but as wise ... understanding what the will of the Lord is.” Ephesians 5:15a, 17b

“Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside [the unsaved] ... Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, That you may know how you ought to answer each one.” Colossians 4:5a, 6

7. Time is our greatest resource, but it is limited and constantly diminishing. Every moment wasted is lost for eternity. And as Haggai is teaching the remnant, all redeemed time is connected to glory in eternity:

- a. in regard to building the Temple (Hag. 2:1–9),
 - b. in regard to genuine repentance (Hag. 2:15–19), and
 - c. in regard to personal faithfulness (Hag. 2:20–23).
8. This is why, in 2 Corinthians 6:1–2, Paul challenges the carnal Corinthian believers to wake up regarding the value of time.

“We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

Paul is speaking to believers here. The “salvation” of which he speaks is deliverance from wasted time, lost opportunity, service of eternal value, and a rewardable life.

9. Again, in Hebrews 3, Paul lays the foundational argument for the entire book, by using the failure of the Exodus generation as a negative example:

“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness’ ... For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is [still being] said: ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts ...’”
 Hebrews 3:7–8, 14–15

10. Next to the word “today” in the above text, the most critical is the little word “if.” We are co-workers with God in time, but it is the “if” in our hearing and obeying the Word of God that determines the eternal outcome—whether of “gold, silver, precious stones” or of “wood, hay, straw” (1 Cor. 3:12). Let us redeem our time wisely!

IF

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
 With sixty seconds’ worth of distance run,
 Yours is the Earth and everything in it.
 And—which is more—you’ll be a man, my son!

—Rudyard Kipling

IV. The Fourth Message: To Zerubbabel (Chapter 2:20–23)

The four messages of Haggai follow a pattern: the first to the leaders—Zerubbabel and Joshua (Chapter 1). The second is to the leaders and the remnant (2:1–9). The third is to the priests, to teach the remnant (2:10–19). And the final is a promise given to Zerubbabel (2:20–23).

Paragraph Seven: God is Able to Turn Cursing into Blessing.
Haggai 2:20–23

God is not only able to empower us to live faithfully for His glory, but He is also able to pick us up, clean us off, and restore us to usefulness and effectiveness for His purposes.

The Passage

1. Verses 20–21: “*Speak to Zerubbabel.*” This closing message is one of comfort and promise. At the beginning of the book, Zerubbabel was failing in his God-given role as leader. Interestingly, his name translates, “born in Babylon.”
2. Verses 21–23: “*I will*” (5x): the words of an unconditional covenant (Gen. 12:1–3). Here, the “shaking” of 2:6–7 is repeated for emphasis, a reference to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 12:26–28), where Paul uses it to challenge us, just as Haggai did to Zerubbabel, “*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.*” (Heb. 12:28).
3. Zerubbabel’s grandfather, Jehoiachin (Coniah) was cursed by God for his persistent unbelief and wickedness (Jer. 22:24–30). God said that if he were the “*signet ring*” on His hand, He would cast him away. The signet ring of the king was the emblem or badge of his royal authority (Esther 8:8).
4. Here, Zerubbabel represents the “signet ring restored,” in the eternal blessing of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. While this promise is Messianic in nature, that does not negate the fact that the promise is personal to Zerubbabel, and that in some way he will hold a place of honor in that eternal kingdom. Again, “What we do in time echoes in eternity.”
5. Haggai concludes the book with a lesson to every believer who has failed but is willing to recover and be restored to being “*a vessel for honor, sanctified, and useful for the Master.*” (2 Tim. 2:21).

The Principle

God is in the business of taking believers who have failed and making them into heroes of the faith. Look at the roster of the “heroes of the faith” in Hebrews 11. All of them had great failures in their lives. The key element in all of them is, they did not quit!

We see a similar restoration and promise of blessing to Joshua, the high priest, in Zechariah 3:1–10, which is again linked to “*My Servant the BRANCH*” (Zech. 3:8), a Messianic reference (see Isa. 4:2; 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). All of these are referenced in Matthew 2:23, because “*Nazareth*” and “*Branch*” in Hebrew are from the same root word.

“Be steadfast ... your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 15:58

We must never forget the principle enunciated by Sir Winston Churchill, “Success is not final; failure is not fatal, it is the courage to continue that counts.”

The people of Nehemiah’s day, shortly after the time of Haggai, learned a vital lesson: God is able to turn cursing into blessing.

“However, our God turned the curse into a blessing.” Nehemiah 13:2b

The above quote from Nehemiah shows that God had turned the attempt of Balak to curse Israel through Balaam into a blessing (Num. 22–24). But there is a deeper truth. It was because of the evil of Balak, a Moabite, that God placed a curse on the Moabites and Ammonites, contained in Deuteronomy 23:3, that they were not allowed into the assembly of the Lord.

However, not only did God overrule the curse of Balak, in the case of Ruth, and turn the curse into a blessing as she married Boaz, but He also brought her into the lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ (Ruth 4:18–21; Matt. 1:5–6).

Don’t Quit

Success is failure turned inside out,
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt.
You never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems so far.
So stick to the fight when you’re hardest hit,
It’s when things seem worst
You must not Quit!

—Edgar Guest

The Practice

Q: When I stand at the Judgment (Bema) Seat, what will be my reward?

When all of the time in my life that I have not redeemed is gone, what will remain?

“Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.”

Hebrews 10:35–36

The Promises of Haggai

1. **1:7**—God promises that He will be glorified in their/our service to Him (Heb. 10:35–36).
2. **1:13**—God promises that He is with them/us (Heb. 13:5–6).

3. **2:5**—God promises that His Spirit remains among them/and He indwells us (Acts 1:8; 2 Tim. 1:4).
4. **2:7**—God promises to fill the Second Temple with His glory, but we who are His Body are a living temple for His glory (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).
5. **2:9**—In addition to glory, God promises to give peace in this place; and we possess peace with God (Rom. 5:1).
6. **2:19**—God promises to bless them; and we possess all of His spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:13).
7. **2:23**—God promises Zerubbabel that He has chosen him and will make him His signet ring. God has chosen us in Christ to be vessels of honor (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 2:4, 9).

The burden of the prophet Haggai was to remind the people of his day that the work they were doing on the Temple would have eternal significance. Though the Temple of Zerubbabel looked small and insignificant in their eyes, God would use it for greater glory than the Temple of Solomon.

Paul reminds us as well that what we are building by our lives will have eternal results (1 Cor. 3:10–15). My prayer for this study is that it will challenge each of us to be a wise builder for eternity.

A Bag of Tools

Isn't it strange that princes and kings,
And clowns that caper in sawdust rings,
And common folks, like you and me,
Are **builders for eternity**?

To each is given a book of rules,
A shapeless mass, and a bag of tools,
And each must fashion, 'ere life is flown,
A stumbling block or a steppingstone.

— R.L. Sharpe (1890)