

Give Careful Thought to Your Ways
Haggai 1:2-14 (7-9)
Grace – June 20, 2010

I. Introduction

For the last few weeks I have speaking about the names of God, but in my regular Scripture reading I recently read the small book of the prophet Haggai. Soon after, I heard a brief devotional on Haggai that stirred my heart and as a result I have been meditating on the passage for some time and now feel led to share it with you.

Lord willing, we will return to the names of God when I return from vacation.

Haggai chapter 1 addresses the issue of priorities and in light of that I share with you the following:

The story is told of a prosperous, young investment banker who was driving a new BMW sedan on a mountain road during a snow storm. As he veered around one sharp turn, he lost control and began sliding off the road toward a steep cliff. At the last moment he unbuckled his seat belt, flung open his door, and leaped from the car, which then plummeted to the bottom of the ravine and burst into a ball of flames. Although he had escaped with his life, the man suffered a ghastly injury. Somehow his arm had been caught near the hinge of the door as he jumped and had been torn off at the shoulder. A passing trucker saw the accident in his rearview mirror, pulled his rig to a halt and ran back to see if he could help. When he arrived at the scene, he found the banker standing at the roadside, looking down at the BMW burning in the ravine below. Incredibly the banker was oblivious to his injury and moaned, "My BMW! My new BMW!" The trucker pointed at the banker's shoulder and said, "You've got bigger problems than that car. We've got to find your arm. Maybe the surgeons can sew it back on!" The banker looked where his arm had been, paused a moment, and groaned, "Oh no! My Rolex! My new Rolex!"

Before moving towards the heart of the message today, I would like to give you a sense of the context that the prophet Haggai is speaking into.

After the reign of King Solomon the nation of Israel split in two. The northern kingdom (called Israel) was destroyed in 701 BC by the Assyrians. This was the result of turning away from God

In 586 BC the southern nation of Judah and the city of Jerusalem along with the temple were completely destroyed by the Babylonians. Most of the people were killed, fled to another country or were carried off to live in Babylon.

At this time Jeremiah prophesied that the exiles would return in 70 years.

“This entire land will become a desolate wasteland. Israel and her neighboring lands will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years. 12 Then, after the seventy years of captivity are over, I will punish the king of Babylon and his people for their sins,” says the Lord. ‘I will make the country of the Babylonians a wasteland forever.’” (Jeremiah 25:11-12, NLT)

The book of Daniel is a record of the time during this captivity.

This prophecy in Jeremiah actually occurred when Cyrus, King of the Persians, conquered Babylon, which was later completely destroyed.

“This is what the Lord says: ‘You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again.’” (Jeremiah 29:10, NLT)

When Cyrus conquered Babylon, he allowed about 45,000 Jews to return to Jerusalem. They brought with them many of the articles used in the former temple and were given initial permission to rebuild the temple. This group was led by Zerubbabel, a descendent of King David, and Joshua, a descendent of Aaron.

Upon arrival, they lay the foundation for a new temple, but after much resistance the work on the temple stops. You can read about all of this in Ezra chapters 1-4.

At the end of chapter 4 the writer of Ezra says: *“So the work on the Temple of God in Jerusalem had stopped, and it remained at a standstill until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia. 5 At that time the prophets Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem. They prophesied in the name of the God of Israel who was over them.”* (Ezra 4:24-5:2, NLT)

This is where Haggai comes in.

II. Give Careful Thought to Your Ways

“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.’” (Haggai 1:2-9, NIV)

I would like to point out two things that have deeply challenged me as I have meditated on this passage.

A. Discipline

Because many Christians live for all practical purposes like atheists, we virtually ignore any relationship between our circumstances and the work of God in our lives.

When difficult things come our way, we rarely stop to ask the Lord what He might be doing in our lives through these circumstances.

But what does our passage say?

“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.’” (Verse 9)

Now, I understand that sometimes difficult things happen in our life that are not directly related to the choices we make. Loved ones pass away, other people sin against us, and a host of other things may happen, but do we ask God what He is doing in our lives through these circumstances?

Twice in this passage the Lord says, *“Give careful thought to your ways.”*

“And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said, ‘My child, don't make light of the Lord's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you. 6 For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.’ 7 As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? 8 If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all. 9 Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever?” (Hebrews 12:5-9, NLT)

Again, I do not believe the Scriptures teach that every experience of suffering or hardship is automatically a sign of God's discipline in our lives.

However, many have moved to the opposite extreme, where there is little sense or expectation of the intervention of God into their everyday affairs.

In light of this, experiences of hardship should always become opportunities for spiritual **reflection** in our lives, turning us towards God to ask the hard questions.

If we need to repent of something, we should seek God's forgiveness and move in obedience to His Word like the returning exiles did.

“Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the Lord their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord.” (Verse 12)

B. Priorities

“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... 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.’” (Haggai 1:2-9, NIV)

These people were not overtly engaged in the things we consider bad. The prophet does not condemn them for sexual immorality or their treatment of the poor.

In fact, they were hard-working people trying to provide for their families. They were planting, harvesting and doing what they could to make a living.

The issue was their priorities. They were putting their own **desires** before their relationship with God.

They built for themselves fancy homes while the temple was in ruins.

And these were not rich people – they were a people who had been displaced from the land, lived as refugees in Babylon and had recently returned to a land that was harsh and desolate.

It is all about priorities. *“Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house.” (verse 9)*

Where are our priorities and how does this passage apply to us today? What does it mean to neglect the temple, when there is no temple today?

Some have taken this passage and used it as a means to raise funds for a building project.

While I believe this passage does speak to us about how we spend our money, I am not asking you to give to a building fund today.

I believe there are at least two things to consider in regards to this passage.

First, the temple represented God’s **presence** with His people, and second, we (plural) are the temple God is building to house His presence.

Simply stated, our priority should be to cultivate our relationship with God on a daily basis, and as a result of that relationship we should be engaging in **activities** that clearly reflect God’s heart and God’s priorities.

I see these activities as outward in focus – God’s heart is for the poor, widowed and others who suffer unjustly.

We should also prioritize the building up of God's people that we might arise to "*build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,*" says the Lord."

This has to do with our interaction with other believers.

Do we really put God first in how we spend our time and/or money, or are we too busy "with our own houses?"

Do our priorities reflect God's priorities?

All that we do should be done so that the Lord may take pleasure in it and be honored.

Next time you consider a major purchase or activity, perhaps it would be good to ask yourselves, "Will God take pleasure in this? Will He be honored in what I am about to do?"

III. Conclusion

God asked the Jewish remnant to do three things: "*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."

Go up, bring down, and build.

This is my encouragement to you today:

Go **up** – seek the Lord in your daily life. Give careful thought to your ways. Seek Him with other believers. Prioritize those things in your life that will draw you closer to God.

Bring **down** – apply your faith in your daily life. Show your love for God and others when you are at work, when you are home, when you are out with your friends.

Build up – the house of God. Build relationships and ministries that serve the community and the rest of your brothers and sisters. Build in such a way that God can take pleasure in what you are doing and He will be honored through you.

"Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the Lord their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord. 13 Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: 'I am with you,' declares the Lord. 14 So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God." (Haggai 1:12-14, NIV)

May God stir our hearts like He did Zerubbabel and Joshua that we will re-prioritize our lives for the glory of God.