

UNFINISHED: A Study on Haggai**Not Done: When God Isn't Finished With What Looks Finished - Haggai 2:1-23****Sunday, August 2nd, 2026 - 10 a.m.**

Open your Bibles to Haggai chapter 2. Last week we were in chapter 1. If you missed it, here's a quick recap on where we've been:

The year is 520 BC. Sixty-six years earlier, Babylon destroyed Jerusalem. They tore down the temple and dragged the people into exile. Then Persia took over, and King Cyrus sent them home and told them to rebuild.

So they went home. They built the altar. They laid the foundation of the temple. There was a worship service that day. Trumpets, singing, people weeping with joy.

And then they stopped building. Opposition pushed back, political pressure got heavy. Basically, the work got hard, and they walked away from the foundation.

Now, quick correction from last week. Last week I said 18 years. Emrika was chatting with me about my math afterward, and she was right. I told you guys I wasn't good with math, especially subtracting.

Here's the actual math: The decree to go back home went out in 538 BC. They got home, and it took them until 536 BC to lay that foundation. Haggai preaches in 520. So from the foundation to Haggai, it was actually 16 years.

18 years was how long it had been since they left Babylon. 16 years was how long that foundation sat there. My point still stands. It's a long time to walk past something God asked you to do.

Do the math on your own life for a second. 16 years ago, what was happening in your life? What were you doing in 2010? I was only 4 years out of high school. I was working in the warehouse of Princess Auto in shipping & receiving. I wasn't married; obviously, no kids.

When I think back to myself at 22, it's like I'm talking about a different person. But that's how long that foundation sat exposed.

And that's what God confronts in chapter 1. Their excuse was, "The time has not yet come." Not "no." Just, "not yet." And after 16 years, "not yet" was doing the work of "no."

God says, "Consider your ways." Look at your life.

And the people did something remarkable. They actually obeyed. And 23 days later they were working again. And the moment they turned, God said four words: "I am with you."

That's chapter 1. What did that take me, 5 minutes? You're probably wondering why I couldn't have been that fast last week.

So here we are, week number 2 of Haggai. When we pick this up this morning, the people are building again. But starting is not the same as finishing. We're going to read from chapter 2 and we'll see that God is speaking to people who have started, but are not done.

1. The Comparison

Haggai 2:1-3 - In the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet: [2] "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people, and say, [3] 'Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?'

Remember last week I said I'm so fascinated by Haggai because it's so precisely dated. We can know that this took place on October 17, 520 BC.

Do the math from chapter 1. They started working on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month. This is the twenty-first day of the "seventh" month. They've been building for about four weeks. Four weeks in, by now, the excitement has worn off.

And there's something else about this specific date. The twenty-first day of the seventh month is the last day of the Feast of Booths. It's a major harvest festival in the Bible that commemorates the 40 years the Israelites spent living in temporary shelters in the wilderness following their Exodus from Egypt. But later on, it was also the same feast where Solomon dedicated the first temple.

So they're standing in a half-built temple during the festival that celebrated and honoured the glory of the temple they lost, and are now rebuilding.

And God asks a question through Haggai: "Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory?"

Solomon's temple came down in 586 BC. This is 520 BC. Please double-check my math, but I think that's 66 years. So anybody who saw the original has to be at least in their 70's. There are a few of them.

And God knows exactly what those old men are thinking. "How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?"

Nothing. That's a brutal word. They're standing in a construction site, comparing this new construction to a memory. And the memory is winning.

Now, they weren't wrong. The first temple was covered in gold. This one wasn't. And it was upsetting to them.

In the book of Ezra, it describes the day they laid the foundation. So this was back from Chapter 1, when they threw a party and celebrated the foundation and altar being built. Look what it said happened then too:

Ezra 3:12 - But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy,

Same crowd. Some cheering, like I mentioned last week. But some were also crying.

So we're 16 years later. Remember, Emrika was right: it wasn't 18 years; it was 16 years after the foundation was laid. And 16 years later, they are still crying about it.

Because here's what happens when you compare the present to the "good 'ol days." The past always wins in our minds. The past is finished. The past is edited; you're more likely to only remember the good times. The past doesn't have scaffolding all over it, and a budget problem. You're comparing a highlight reel to a Thursday afternoon.

And every one of us does this. You compare your marriage now to the first year of your marriage. You compare your faith now to the summer at camp in high school when everything felt electric. You compare this season of your life to a version of the past that never actually existed the way you now remember it.

And so you conclude: "this" is nothing. It's not like it used to be. It's nothing. But God doesn't scold them for feeling that way. He does something better.

Haggai 2:4-5 - Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the Lord. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the Lord. Work, for I am with you, declares the Lord of hosts, [5] according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not.

Three times. Be strong, Zerubbabel. Be strong, Joshua. Be strong, all you people. The governor, the priest, and everybody else.

Nobody is exempt from this feeling of discouragement. And nobody is exempt from the command he gives either. "Work, for I am with you."

That's the same as chapter 1. He said it when they started, and He says it again four weeks in. When they want to quit, cause the excitement has worn off.

God doesn't say "I am with you" once, and then just expects you to remember it. He's continually trying to remind us.

Look at verse 5: "My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not."

That was the answer to: "Is it not as 'nothing' in your eyes?"

They're looking at the new building. And God points out to them: The glory was never "the gold." The glory was that God was there. And He still is.

Haggai 2:6-9 - For thus says the Lord of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. [7] And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts.

[8] The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts. [9] The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts.'"

They're worried about funding this building, a building that is being built for a God who owns everything.

And then the promise in verse 9. "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former."

Think about how impossible that would have sounded. There is no way this building is going to out-glorify Solomon's temple. And the truth is, it never did. There was no ark of the covenant. No visible cloud of glory. Less gold, smaller footprint, worse view.

By every measurement the old men were using, God's promise looked false. But God wasn't measuring the building.

Roughly 500 years later, a carpenter from Nazareth walked through the courts of that temple, and taught in it. God in flesh, standing inside the building that they thought was "nothing."

That's the greater glory. Not better architecture. A better presence.

And that last line of verse 9: "In this place I will give peace."

The peace God promised in that building wasn't a feeling. It was a person. Jesus stood in that temple and said, "Peace I leave with you."

So when God said "greater glory," He wasn't grading their construction work. He was telling them what He was going to do in that building. The same building they could barely stand to look at.

2. The Contamination

Haggai 2:10-14 - On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, [11] "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Ask the priests about the law: [12] 'If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?'" The priests answered and said, "No." [13] Then Haggai said, "If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?" The priests answered and said, "It does become unclean." [14] Then Haggai answered and said, "So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, declares the Lord, and so with every work of their hands. And what they offer there is unclean."

They're now 3 months into the building project. December 18, 520 BC.

And God tells Haggai to go ask the priests two questions about the law.

Question one: If you're carrying holy meat, and the fold of your robe touches some bread, does the bread become holy? The priests say: no.

Question two: If somebody who touched a dead body touches that same food, does it become unclean? The priests say: yes.

What's the point of all this? Holiness is not contagious. But defilement is.

You cannot make something holy by putting it next to something holy. But you can absolutely contaminate something that was clean if it's touching something unclean.

And in verse 14, God turns it on them: "So is it with this people, and with every work of their hands."

Which would be a hard thing to hear when you're three months into building God a temple. They're doing the work. They're on site. They're handling holy things.

And God says, the work isn't making you holy. Being near the temple doesn't make your heart clean.

And that relates to us too. Here we are, we all got up this morning and got ourselves ready to go to church. But you can be here every week. You can be serving on a team here. You can run the sound board, sing on the platform, teach the kids upstairs, help with Church at Regent Park. You can carry holy things around "in the fold of your garment" for years.

And none of it transfers. Working for God is not the same as a relationship with God.

That's not a knock on serving. You absolutely should be serving. Remember, chapter 1 was literally God telling them to get to work. But work was never the thing that cleaned anybody up. If it was, the busiest people in this room would be the holiest, and every one of us knows that's not how it goes.

So that's the diagnosis. Then watch what God does with it.

Haggai 2:15-19 - Now then, consider from this day onward. Before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the Lord, [16] how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty. [17] I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and with mildew and with hail, yet you did not turn to me, declares the Lord. [18] Consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider: [19] Is the seed yet in the barn? Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have yielded nothing. But from this day on I will bless you."

"Consider." There it is again. 2 times in chapter 1, and 3 more right here. That word frames the entire book.

And what God asks them to consider is the years before they started building.

In verse 16, He says,

"When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty."

Everything came up basically in half. That's similar to what He said in chapter 1 about the bag with holes.

But verse 17 adds something chapter 1 didn't say out loud. "I struck you, yet you did not turn to me."

That's the saddest line in the book. The blight, the mildew, the hail. None of it was random "unlucky" weather. It was God trying to get their attention. For 16 years, and it didn't work.

Now, last week I said you can't reverse-engineer every hard season into a verdict from God. Job's friends tried that, and God rebuked them for it. That's still true.

But notice what's happening here. Blight and mildew aren't random words. Do you remember in Deuteronomy, when God made His covenant with Israel? He spelled out exactly what walking away from Him would cost. And blight and mildew are on that list. By name.

So Israel wasn't guessing at what a bad harvest meant. They had a document. And they had a prophet standing in front of them telling them what God was saying.

You don't have either one of those. There is no verse in the New Testament that says, "If you drift from God, your income drops."

So when a hard season hits you, "What did I do to deserve this" is the wrong question. But here's what does carry over. The tragedy in verse 17 isn't that God struck them. It's the last five words. "You did not turn to me."

They lived through every one of those years. They felt every bad harvest. They just never turned.

You may never find out why a season was hard. That's above my pay grade and yours. But you always get to answer the other question. During that, "Did I turn to Him?"

And then in verses 18-19. God asks a farming question. "Is the seed yet in the barn?" The answer to this rhetorical question, is no. It's December, which means they've just finished planting. Every seed they had, would have been in the ground. They wouldn't have kept any of it in the barn.

There's no harvest until April. So they have 4 months of waiting. 4 months of dirt before they know how much is going to grow.

But then look at the things after that God mentions: The vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, the olive tree. These are all harvested in the fall. Grapes and figs would be late summer, pomegranates and olives were September or October. So those harvests had already finished. Verse 19 says they yielded nothing.

So look at where these people are standing. Behind them, a year that failed. Ahead of them, a field with nothing in it yet. Empty barn. Empty branches. And four months before they find out if this year is any different.

That's the exact moment God says: "From this day on I will bless you."

Not "once you produce something." Not "let's see how the harvest goes and then we'll talk." Before there's a single thing to show for it, God commits to bless them.

That's grace. He just told them their hands were unclean, and their work was contaminated. And His very next move is to promise blessing. Not because they cleaned themselves up. Because that's who He is.

The people who could not make themselves holy, they get blessed by the God who can.

3. The Signet Ring

Haggai 2:20-23 - The word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, [21] "Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, [22] and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother. [23] On that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord of hosts."

A signet ring was a king's seal. You'd press it into wax to sign a decree. It carried the king's authority. It was the single most personal thing a king owned. So personal, he'd wear it on his hand.

Now here's why this verse stands out. Zerubbabel's grandfather was a king named Jehoiachin.

It's a bit confusing, but sometimes he's also called Coniah or Jeconiah. He was one of the last kings of Judah before the exile.

And God had said something about him in:

Jeremiah 22:24 - As I live, declares the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet ring on my right hand, yet I would tear you off

Same image of that signet ring. But God says: "Even if you were the ring on my hand, I would rip you off and throw you away."

Then a few verses later God says none of his offspring will sit on David's throne.

That's the family Zerubbabel comes from. A cursed line. A ring torn off God's hand.

And in the last verse of Haggai, God says to that man's grandson: "I will take you, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you."

He put the ring back on. The curse was reversed. The line that God tore off, God picks back up.

And that matters for a reason bigger than just Zerubbabel. Because if you open the New Testament to the very first chapter of Matthew, Zerubbabel's name is there. He's in the genealogy of Jesus. And Luke's genealogy has him too.

The signet ring that God "put back on His hand" now runs straight to a manger in Bethlehem.

So the book that opens with people making excuses about a construction project closes with a promise about the Messiah. That's not a small ending.

Look at the shape of these two chapters.

Chapter 1: get to work. Chapter 2: the work will be more glorious than you can see. Your hands are dirtier than you think, but I'm going to bless you anyway. And I've chosen a man from a cursed family to carry my promise.

Every single one of those is God saying the same thing. "I am not done." Not done with this building. Not done with these people. Not done with this family line.

They looked at a half-finished temple and called it nothing. God looked at the same pile of stone and saw the place His Son would stand.

So here's the question this morning. What are you looking at and calling "nothing"?

Is it the state of your faith right now, compared to how it used to feel? Is it a marriage that isn't what it was? Is it something you started for God and stopped, and now it looks too far gone to be worth restarting?

You're doing what those old men did. Comparing what's in front of you to a memory, and then writing it off.

God's word to them was not "You're right, I guess it is 'nothing.'" It was: "Be strong, do the work, I am with you, and the glory of this thing is going to be greater than anything you remember."

Because God does not evaluate things by what they currently look like. He evaluates them by what He intends to do with them.

And He is not done. Not with doing that. And He's not done with you either.