

UNFINISHED: A Study on Haggai**Not Yet: When 'Not Yet' Becomes 'No' - Haggai 1:1-15****Sunday, July 26th, 2022 - 10 a.m.**

Open your Bibles to Haggai chapter 1. It's near the end of the Old Testament — Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. Two chapters. Right between the two books that start with "Z."

Haggai might be the least-preached book in your Bible. Which is strange, because it's one of the most precisely dated books in all of Scripture, it's short enough to read in ten minutes, and it speaks directly into a question every single one of us is asking right now: What does God expect from me in the meantime? Not on the mountaintop. Not in the crisis. In the meantime. The ordinary in-between stretches of life where nothing dramatic is happening, and it's tempting just to coast.

Here's the setting. The year is 520 BC. Sixty-six years earlier, Babylon destroyed Jerusalem. Burned the city, tore down the temple, dragged the people into exile. Then Babylon fell to Persia, and the Persian king Cyrus did something no one expected: he sent the Jewish people home and told them to rebuild their temple. He even funded it.

So they went home. About fifty thousand of them. And they started. They cleared the rubble. They laid the foundation. There was a worship service on the day the foundation went down with trumpets, singing, people weeping with joy.

And then they stopped building. Local opposition started to push back. Political pressure got stronger. The work got hard. And the people set down their tools and walked away from the foundation.

18 years goes by, and the foundation of God's house has just been sitting there, exposed to the elements. Weeds are probably growing through the stones. Every person in Jerusalem walks past it. Everyone can see it. But everyone has also learned to stop seeing it.

That's when God sends a preacher named Haggai.

Haggai 1:1 - In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest

We know the actual date this happened. August 29, 520 BC. This isn't a parable. This happened on a specific morning to specific people, and God's word came with a specific charge.

1. The Excuse

Haggai 1:2 - Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord.

Notice God doesn't say "my people." He says "these people." There's distance in that. Not because God has abandoned them. You'll see the rest of the book proves He hasn't. But because their actions have been saying something that their mouths would never say.

And what's their reasoning? "The time has not yet come." Not "we refuse to rebuild the temple." Nobody in Jerusalem was saying that. Nobody said, "God's house doesn't matter." They said something far more comfortable: "Just not yet."

The economy is unstable. The opposition is getting stronger. The timing is just wrong. "We'll build. Oh yeah, we mean it, we'll build, just not now." Ask us again ... maybe next season?

For eighteen years, "not yet" was really doing the work of "no." That's what makes this excuse so dangerous. Open rebellion is easy to spot. You know when you're shaking your fist at God, and saying "no." But indefinite postponement feels responsible. It feels wise. You never actually said "no" to God. You just never actually say "yes."

And God answers the excuse with a question.

Haggai 1:3-4 - Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, [4] "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?"

Panelled houses. When I think of the houses the Israelites lived in, I'm not picturing wood panelled houses as you'd see in the 60s or 70s. Back then, cedar panelling was luxury finishing. It's the kind of detail Solomon put in the original temple. These people had the time, the money, and the energy to build. They'd been building for 18 years. They just aimed all of it at what they wanted.

The problem was never that the calendar was too full. It felt like it. Their excuse was, "The time has not yet come." But somehow the time had come for: Their renovations, their comfort, their projects. The issue wasn't timing. It never was. The issue was always their priority.

And before we shake our heads at these people living in Jerusalem, think about our lives, because this is aimed at us too. Is there a version of "not yet" running in your life right now?

I'll get serious about my walk with God after this semester calms down. I'll start serving when work slows down. I'll deal with that sin when I'm in a better headspace. I'll have that conversation, make that commitment, take that step, later. "The time has not yet come."

Meanwhile, the paneling goes up, because we always find time for what we've decided matters. Nobody in this room plans to neglect God. We just postpone Him. After 18 years of "not yet" it's hard to tell the difference between a "not yet" and a "no."

2. The Diagnosis

So God tells them to do something.

Haggai 1:5 - Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways.

Literally in Hebrew that means: "Set your heart upon your ways." Stop. Look at your life. Actually look at it.

This command is all through the Bible. God says it twice in this chapter alone here in verse 5 and later in verse 7. Because these people weren't wicked in ways they could see. They were busy, hardworking, decent people. And busy, hardworking, decent people can drift for two decades without ever once stopping to examine where the drift has taken them.

So God holds up a mirror. "Consider your ways."

Haggai 1:6 - You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

That sounds like something super relatable you'd read in your daily devotional book. It sounds like a conversation at the dinner table between close friends. Doesn't it? Not like a verse from the Old Testament. Earning wages to put them into a bag with holes.

That's a Tuesday. That's the direct deposit that's gone by the next day. That's working harder than ever, and feeling further behind. Everything they did: much effort, little return. Eating without satisfaction. Earning without keeping. Their whole economy of life ran at a deficit.

And here's what God wants them to see. Guys, all of that; that wasn't just bad luck.

Haggai 1:7-11 - "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. [8] Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the Lord. [9] You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away.

...Why? declares the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. [10] Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. [11] And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labours."

"I blew it away." God takes responsibility for their frustration. The drought, the thin harvests, the leaking bank account; that was Him. This is an example of a verse most people would usually leave out of a sermon. That doesn't sound very loving of God to do that to them. Why would a "loving God" do that to His people?

It wasn't because God is petty. It was actually because God is merciful. He loved them too much to let self-centred living feel like it was working. Frustration was the kindest thing God could send them. If the crops had flourished while the temple sat in ruins, God would have silently been teaching them that He doesn't mind being last. The emptiness was a message.

Now, careful here. This is not a formula. You can't reverse-engineer every hard season into a verdict. Job's friends tried that, and God rebuked them for it. Sometimes crops fail in a fallen world, and it means nothing about your heart.

But sometimes. Sometimes! The dissatisfaction we feel causes us to check our hearts, the way we bring our cars to the mechanic to have them scanned. Some of you might even try to skip the bringing the car in part, and do your best to replicate the sound of your car with your mouth to Mark or Dan Snider in the foyer when you see them. Or it's like telling your techie friend, "I don't know, my computer just feels 'laggy'; can you have a look at it?"

Sometimes the emptiness you feel is not a problem to be solved with more effort. It's a symptom pointing at a priority. What does God tell them to do? "Consider your life."

When life feels like a bag with holes, when you're pouring out effort and nothing satisfies, the first question shouldn't be: "How do I work harder?" It's should be: "What have I put first?"

Because a life organized around: My house, My comfort, My kingdom. It will leak. It was designed to. "Our hearts are restless until they rest in God" Augustine wrote that in 397AD. And it sums up this first chapter of Haggai perfectly.

3. The Response

Here's where the story turns, and it turns fast.

Haggai 1:12 - Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord.

They obeyed. That's it. That's the response. No committee needed. No study required. No "let's pray about it for a season." The word of God landed, and the people moved.

This makes Haggai pretty unique in terms of the other prophets. Isaiah preached for decades and watched the nation ignore him. Jeremiah got thrown in a pit. Haggai preached one sermon, and the entire community repented. It seems like Haggai has the highest success rate of any preacher in the Old Testament. In baseball terms you'd say: He's batting a thousand. One sermon, full obedience.

And look what God says the moment they turn.

Haggai 1:13 - Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message, "I am with you, declares the Lord."

Four words: "I am with you." Notice when God says it. Not after the temple is finished. Not after they've proven themselves with a few years of faithfulness. The moment their hearts turned, before a single stone was lifted, God's said, "I am with you."

Not "it's about time." Not a review of the 18 wasted years. "I am with you." That's God's heart for returning people. He doesn't meet repentance with a lecture. He's not a disappointed Dad. He is WITH you.

Haggai 1:14 - And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. And they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God

The God stirred up their spirit. The energy for the work came from God. But watch the order: Obedience first. Stirring second. They didn't wait to feel inspired before they obeyed. They obeyed, and God supplied the fire — the drive to work, to serve Him.

We tend to run that backwards. We wait to feel moved before we move. We want the passion first, and the obedience after. Haggai 1 says the stirring comes after the step. Move toward God, and God moves in (and with) you.

Verse 15 closes the chapter with another date.

Haggai 1:15 - on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

"the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month." I'm bad with math, but even I can do this math: 18 years of "not yet" ended in only 23 days. It didn't take 18 more years to get out of their comfort zone. It only took them 23 days until they were working again.

Sometimes we're so familiar with our old ways that it takes some time to build a new habit. I've heard it takes 21 days of doing something to build a new habit. But when I looked that up that's not actually the case, so pretend I never said any of this.

Back to the point. Maybe God is saying to us right now,

"Consider your ways."

Where has "not yet" been quietly running your life? Not your neighbour's life. Yours. What has God put in front of you that you've postponed so long that you've stopped seeing it, the way Jerusalem stopped seeing that foundation?

Maybe it's your walk with Jesus that's been on hold until life settles down. Maybe it's a calling you've shelved. Maybe it's: Serving, Giving, Forgiving, Obeying in some specific area. You've never said "no" to God about it. You've just never said "now."

Here's the good news of Haggai 1. 18 years of drifting didn't disqualify them. The moment they turned to God. He said, "I am with you," And He supplied everything the work required.

He'll say the same to you. Not after you've fixed it. The moment you turn to Him.

The time has come. You don't need to wait for when circumstances improve. You don't need to wait for the season to change. God's word to His people in the meantime is: "Just do it now, what are you waiting for? I'll be with you."

God's promise to everyone who moves is the same promise He gave that morning in 520 BC: "I am with you."