

Lost & Found Center Teaching Series



# **WHEN GOD IS THE PROBLEM**

## Introduction

The book of Haggai is a short kind of an obscure book about the rebuilding of the temple of Jerusalem, but the Spirit of God has something rather intriguing to say to us as you can tell from the title of this message, so let's get started.

**In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest:** Haggai 1:1 NIV

Notice the use of the words **through** and **to**. The word of the Lord came **through** Haggai **to** Zerubbabel and **to** Joshua. The word of the Lord came **through** Haggai and it doesn't say how – it often doesn't say how it came. I take that to mean that it can be unique for each person. God showed up loud and clear to Haggai not to be mistaken for something else – like Haggai's own thoughts. I've heard the argument that we must cultivate our ability to hear God. That sounds good on the surface but never discount the truth that God can easily and effortlessly make himself heard to anyone he wants to. On the other hand a truly complex thing about our God is that he allows himself to be ignored by us. Think about that for a moment.

Notice also that the word of the Lord was meant for Zerubbabel and Joshua but God sent it there through Haggai. It wasn't for Haggai and it wasn't for his friends or for his ministry. The word of God is not about the prophet but about the message. So why does the Lord sometimes use prophets? Well sometimes he needs a few people who can reliably see, hear and then repeat. Did you get that? Those types are rare.

**This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.' "** Haggai 1:2 NIV

What in your life - that is from the Lord – have you been putting off? This is one of the key messages of the book of Haggai. There are things in our lives that God wants done. In this case he wants his house to be re-built and re-established after its destruction. But what is it in your case?

**Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. 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."** Haggai 1:5-6 NIV

The Lord is saying to take a spiritual assessment of your life because things are not working. This looks like a good new year's message. Things are difficult.

Let's check off God's assessment.

1. You have planted much, but have harvested little.

Unproductive. Your 're not getting out what you expect. The time or effort you're putting in is not amounting to anything.

2. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill.

Unsatisfied. You're left empty. You feel lacking or unsettled. Unfulfilled.

3. You put on clothes, but are not warm.

Ineffective. The adjustments aren't working. The changes you're trying aren't succeeding.

4. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.

Unprofitable. When the opportunities come they are lost. Even when things begin to look up, they take a turn for the worst.

Why me? Let's keep reading and learn a little about our God. This is God talking remember.

**"You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little... Haggai 1:9 NIV**

**"But see"** Can you see? Do you see?

**Side note: Rebellion blinds.**

**Son of man you are living among a rebellious people. They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear (why?) because they are a rebellious people. Ezekiel 12:2 NIV**

This verse answers the first question. How to cultivate our ability to hear. It's not about being quiet because quiet rebellion still results in blindness.

When you find yourself in this situation, don't just roll over and give up. Resist the temptation to say "oh, well." Ask him why. Lord why is this happening? Here comes God's answer so watch closely. Here God is revealing the source of your problems (in this case).

**... "What you brought home, I blew away... " Haggai 1:9 NIV**

There. A clean and simple explanation – no spiritual guess work, no psychological rationalization. Who did it? Who blew it away? God did. Did you get that? Because that is an important lesson in Haggai.

Why?" declares the LORD Almighty.

**... "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. Haggai 1:9 NIV**

Because you are interested in you and only you, then nothing will work for you. When you ignore the plan of God in your life, how can you possibly live in his blessings at the same time?

**Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands."**

Haggai 1:10-11 NIV

Do you see what he is saying here? God is saying that sometimes, now I'm not saying all the times, but sometimes, He is the problem of our lives.

Again...

**I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands."**

Haggai 1:11 NIV

A drought on the labor of your hands. That means no matter how hard you work, you're not going to accomplish anything. Ever been there? Are you there now?

Note to self. When God is making your life difficult. It is guaranteed to be difficult.

Note to self. When God is making life difficult, rebuking the devil can't be the answer.

Note to self. When God is making life difficult, tithing more won't do anything.

Note to self. Sometimes God is the source of my problems.

Note to self. No I'm not crazy. Read Haggai.

Now the people of Israel reacted to this message that God was the source of their problems. How would you react if a prophet of God came up to you and said, "Oh, by the way. All the things that you are going through, all the things that are causing you grief and problems right now. It's because of me." How would you respond? I think you would respond similar to how the Israelites responded. The Bible says:

**...And the people feared the LORD.** Haggai 1:12 NIV

To fear the Lord is a very good thing. The people were brought to see the reality of God's hand in their lives. Would they have been able to see it without the difficulties? Maybe not. Would they have been able to see it without the prophetic? Again, maybe not. In any event, to arrive at the fear of the Lord is a good thing.

**"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.** Proverbs 9:10 NIV

The fear of the Lord is a great first step. Wherever there is no fear of God, there is limited knowledge of God. Let's remember that.

*Wherever there is no fear of God, there is limited knowledge of God.*

Is there the fear of the Lord in our churches? If not, there's not a lot to learn about God there. Here's my simple definition for the fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord means to be more concerned about what God thinks than what you think or what others think. Digest that if you can. I'm still working on it myself.

Back to the text. Why would they be frightened? Maybe they thought, wow, I didn't know that God could be that involved in my life. And as they thought about it, they naturally reasoned that God sees what's going on and he's not pleased. That would scare me as well.

But the Bible says that they responded. They obeyed the word of the Lord. Did their plans have to change – yes. Did their schedule - yes. Did it require effort on their part? That's Haggai chapter 2.

## Be Strong and Work

Chapter 2 begins just like chapter 1. The word of the Lord returned to Haggai and this is what he said:

**Ask them, 'Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?' Haggai 2:3 NIV**

The house of the Lord may be a mess right now, but does anybody remember what it used to look like? The Lord is going to encourage them. This is what he says:

**But 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, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the LORD Almighty. 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.'** Haggai 2:4-5 NIV

He says be strong 3 times so there's no excuse to miss it. Here is the message of the Lord to us:

Be strong and work. I am with you, my spirit is with you so do not fear. Do not allow fear to keep you from the work. Do not allow fear to keep you from your purpose which is my purpose for you.

Be strong and work.

Surprised? There are times in our lives when the word of the Lord to us is to work and don't quit. He's not saying to stand back and watch. He's saying be strong and work – big difference. Who does the Lord command to be strong? Us. Who does he command to do the work? Us.

Be strong and work. That's the message from the Lord.

Now strength is about holding on, digging in, enduring, bearing up and standing firm. When the word of the Lord talks about one of these, it is talking about being strong. Strength is a key part of the Christian life. Don't forget that. Strength is critical. Here's an interesting verse to remember.

**It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.** Galatians 5:1 NIV

Simple translation - We need strength to be free. That is the nature of our reality as believers. Strength is required for our freedom. Strength then is not an option.

## Timing

There is a time to be strong then, but we can't end the study like that. It wouldn't be fair for me to say be strong. So let's go back to Haggai take a step back and look at the timing here because it fills in a gap in our study.

When you look at Haggai, you can't help but see the precision of the dates that he's recorded. The precision is intentional. Those dates are important because they tell us the order in which things occurred and from that order we can learn a few things about God. There are four dates that Haggai records.

1. 1<sup>st</sup> day of 6<sup>th</sup> month Word of the Lord comes to Haggai

This is how our story opens and this date is our marker for everything that comes after. During this day, the Lord reveals to the people that He is the problem.

2. 24<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month People begin working on the temple

The people responded the Bible says by fearing God. They understood and as is recorded, 23 days after God's word came to Haggai, the people began to do what God had said. Were things still difficult. Answer – yes.

3. 21<sup>st</sup> day of 7<sup>th</sup> month Word of the Lord comes to Haggai to Encourage

Now, about a month after the people have begun working, the word of the Lord comes again to encourage them. Think about what encourage really means, it means to add courage, to strengthen. Look at what's happening here. God is actually helping them accomplish what he has asked them to do. Remember that for your life. Whatever he requires from you, ask his help to accomplish it. At this time, are things still difficult. Answer – yes.

4. 24<sup>th</sup> day of 9<sup>th</sup> month the foundation of the Lord's temple has been laid

The word of the Lord comes again to tell the people that he will no longer be the problem but that he will bless them. This occurs a couple of months after they have begun working. Can you see this. It is only after they have gotten started that the Lord stops being the source of their difficulties.

### **Conclusion**

So the book of Haggai shows that God can be the problem. He can be the source of difficulties in our lives -not by accident but by intention. Can you see this? Can you see the complexity of the God that we serve? Can you see also that God is not our problem just to be our problem but he can be our problem to accomplish his purposes? Can you accept that? More importantly, can you embrace it?

How about praying something like this?

Lord, I know that in my times of rebellion I am blinded to your purposes in my life. I accept and understand that you can be the source of the difficulties that I am now facing. Keep it up Lord until I can see and make the changes you require. Empower me to be strong and to do the work that you have laid out for me. Amen.

**Notes**

For Questions or Comments please respond to [info@lostandfoundcenter.org](mailto:info@lostandfoundcenter.org) and visit [www.lostandfoundcenter.org](http://www.lostandfoundcenter.org) for additional information.

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