

THE ROAD TO RESTORATION

A MESSAGE FROM THE PROPHET HAGGAI

by Armando Rodriguez

There are three men in the Old Testament who are called the prophets of restoration. They are Haggai, Zacharias and Malachi. They dedicated themselves to the restoration of God's people after being released from the Babylonian captivity. They were responsible for assisting God's people to carry out God's will.

The book of Haggai focuses on the theme of restoration. God's people had a wonderful beginning, but soon became distracted. They had been rescued from slavery. They had returned to Jerusalem with joy in order to carry out God's purpose of rebuilding the city and its temple. They were beside themselves as they celebrated the privilege of service to God. Maybe this is why the name Haggai means "to celebrate."

But not long after they begin their work, their attitude changed. They lost their zeal and became indifferent to the things of God. They began to live for themselves. God's work, the rebuilding of the temple, came to a halt for 14 years as they made excuses for their failure. This is the context of this book.

How did God respond to these people? How did He motivate them to get back on task? That will be the theme of our study. I would like to address three points.

- a. The Condition of God's People
- b. God's Discipline
- c. God's Restoration

THE ROAD TO RESTORATION

THE CONDITION OF GOD'S PEOPLE (1-4)

1:1 In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, 2 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built. 3 Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, 4 Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?

Verses 1-4 reveal the current spiritual state of God's people. God sent a message through the prophet Haggai to the leaders of Israel. What did He communicate? He made them aware of the spiritual condition of His people. Their heart had become cold. In verse 2, God declares, "These people say that it is not time rebuild My house. Evidently, they had set aside God's plan in order to focus on their own concerns and interests. God no longer had first place in their lives. God states, while my house lays waste, each one of you is taking care of personal business. Upon His visit, God finds His people dwelling in their "ceiled houses."

Do you remember when you were first converted? My life was characterized by zeal and love for divine things. I was moving at full speed. Along the way, certain things happened and my heart became cold. Why do hearts grow cold? Why do people become discouraged? Why does zeal die?

Paul, describes the believer as an earthen vessel that contain a treasure. We are vessels of Christ. Christ indwells us. When we are in our first love, we appreciate the Christ in the container. We are enthusiastic when we see or meet a fellow believer. Something in us bears witness with them. As times moves on, **our eyes begin to move away from the indwelling Christ to the flawed vessel.** We become aware of weakness, failure and remaining sin. Eventually, we become discouraged and our walk with God suffers.

THE ROAD TO RESTORATION

Jesus, in His parable of the sower outlines a series of distractions that paralyze our service to God. Jesus states, “They receive the word with joy, but then comes affliction, persecution, the worries of life, and the deceitfulness of riches.” These things distract and cause us to become fruitless. We set God’s plan aside and become absorbed in our own dreams and aspirations. The believers in Haggai’s day were no different. They became caught up in building “paneled houses” for themselves. Fourteen years elapsed and God’s plan moved down the priority list.

GOD’S DISCIPLINE

5 Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. 6 Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. 7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. 8 Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. 9 Ye looked for much, and, lo it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. 10 Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. 11 And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.

Note God’s response to their indifference and lack of concern. In verses 6-11, God pleads with His people when he states, “Consider your ways.” He encourages them to get back on task. God specifically provides them with a plan of action. He tells them, “Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house. I will take pleasure in it and will be glorified.” After waiting for a response, God then moves to take disciplinary action.

The prophet paints a picture of the problems that befell God’s people due to their disobedience. Let’s list the issues that they faced:

THE ROAD TO RESTORATION

1. “You have sown much and bring in little.”
(They were getting a poor return on their investment of labor.)
2. “You eat, but you have not enough, drink, but you are not filled and clothe yourself, but there is none warm.”
(Satisfaction had eluded them. There was a sense of emptiness that accompanied those activities that were meant to provide comfort.)
3. “You put your wages into a bag with holes.”
(There was more month at the end of the money. There was never enough to go around.)
4. “When you brought it home, I blew on it.” (God took credit for the problems they faced.)

In verse 9, God provides the reader with His motive for action. God would not remain silent while His plan was set aside. Is there anything wrong with building a house? Why would God discipline a group of people for building a home? The problem was not the action of building a house, it was the indifference to God’s plan. God desires that we enjoy His abundance. He has given us all things to freely enjoy. The problem with this scenario is one of total neglect for God’s presence and plan.

Disciplinary action comes to us when we neglect God’s plan and purpose for our lives. The apostle Paul repeatedly reminds us that we have been set aside for divine use. We forget that God brought us into this world in order to fulfill a predetermined mission. We become caught up with living for the moment. We embrace a lifestyle that focuses on the earthly and avoids the divine. We attend to the temporal things of life and disregard the eternal. The creature ignores the creator and pretends to be the captain of his or her own destiny. The problem is not one of building a house, it is all about apathy and indifference to God.

THE ROAD TO RESTORATION

Again in verse 9, God takes full responsibility for the tools of discipline He uses in order to redirect His people. Let's review the list. God sent a drought. The prophet states, the heavens stayed from dew. God's action affected...

1. the land
2. the mountains
3. the corn
4. the new wine
5. the oil
6. productive power of the soil
7. the productive ability of men, cattle and labor

Listen to God's declaration, "I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands; **yet ye turned not to me.**" (2:17) God would not be ignored. This pattern is found in other places in Scripture. I am reminded of Jonah the prophet. Scripture informs us that God generated an entire storm in order to get a man's attention. When our lives are headed in a path of destruction, as creator, God has the option of using any means available to turn us around.

God is the same yesterday, today and forever. He continues to demonstrate His love by redirecting us. The type of discipline we see in this book is a last resort. It comes to us as an act of mercy. When the storm sets in, it is important to look up. It is time to seek God's face. Time to make some adjustments.

The last thing I see in this first chapter of Haggai is God's desire to restore us when we fail or fall. God takes no pleasure in our pain. His heart is to renew, restore and revive.

THE ROAD TO RESTORATION

GOD'S RESTORATION

12 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, 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 did fear before the LORD. 13 Then spake Haggai the LORD'S messenger in the LORD'S message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD. 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 Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, 15 In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

Verses 12-15 report the results of a proper response to God. Again, the leaders of the community along with God's people obeyed the voice of the Lord and did fear before the LORD.

God confirmed His presence by stating, "I am with you." What a wonderful beginning. God's desire is never to highlight our weakness, failure or sin. His heart is to restore us. When we sin, he is ready to forgive. He is the God of beginnings. I don't know about you, but when I take a wrong turn in my life, I usually become disoriented. Doubt sets in. I become aimless. It is not until God confirms, "I am with you" that I regain my sense of direction.

The reader is informed that God's people obeyed. They came to the realization that they had missed the mark. (the effects of the drought I suppose) God's people then feared the Lord. King Solomon refers to the "Fear of the LORD" as the hatred for and a departure from evil. (Prov. 3:7; 8:13) Solomon records that the whole duty of a human being is to "Fear the LORD." (Ecc. 12:13) The realization of our failure is the first step to restoration. The second step is one of pushing away those things that bring the curse of sin. This is still the pattern today. We must acknowledge our sin, move away from it and then obey. When we do these things, God rescues us from apathy and complacency by

THE ROAD TO RESTORATION

stirring up our spirit. The prophet states that the LORD stirred up their spirit. God not only forgave them, but also restored the will to obey and work. We are informed that God's people were restored to the privilege of service.

Chapter one answers several questions. When we become cold and indifferent to God, how does he move us to the realization of our failure? He allows things to come into our lives to awaken us to our need for change. The negative things that come our way turn us in the right direction. How is the motivation for service ignited? When we confess our sin, God is then moved to restore us by giving us the desires necessary to carry out our God given mission. Our sense of direction in life and the power to act are present when we are in right with God.

THE ROAD TO RESTORATION

In chapter one of Haggai, we were introduced to a people who had been rescued from slavery. They were assigned the divine task of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. After a season of work and enjoying their freedom, they became apathetic and complacent. The divine project came to a halt and God was moved to action.

In this chapter, we will focus on three points.

1. Problems (3, 9, 11-14)
2. Promises (5, 6-9)
3. Potential (15-19)

PROBLEMS

3 Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?

9 The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.

11 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying, 12 If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. 13 Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. 14 Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the LORD; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean.

There were problems that plagued God's people. **The first thing** we see in this chapter is related to problems with the past. The people were fixated on the past. (3) Their entire outlook or focus was on the good old days. They were comparing the past with the present.

THE ROAD TO RESTORATION

God declared through the mouth of the prophet, “Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? How do ye see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?”

While they were thinking about the glories of the past, God focused their attention on the present. In verse 9, God informs them that he intends to do a greater work. He states again, “The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.”

When they looked at the task before them, God’s people had to readjust their focus. Many of them had seen the temple in its former glory, but were unable to see how that glory would be restored.

As I consider chapter two, I am reminded of several things that happen among us when we venture out to accomplish great things. We become discouraged with the present because of our perceptions the past.

I have often heard people say, “when brother Ideal was here, the church was full. We had a big choir. Things were alive! Now, well, we have this!” The past has its place. The past is one of many teachers that God gives to us. But, the past becomes an enemy when it dampens our desire to act. God challenges His people to stop venerating the past and refocus on God’s new plan for the future.

The second problem they faced is related to their past failure. They had enjoyed God’s glory and blessing and then lost it. They had been enslaved for 70 years because of their sin. They may have felt shame and guilt because of their history. They did not feel qualified or useful to God.

I think we can relate. God’s calling is a calling to greatness. How often have we failed to see God’s great ability and power to realize the miracle we need. God is

THE ROAD TO RESTORATION

a God of beginnings. His grace and forgiveness will always be greater than our sin and failure. He is not interested in who you were; He is concerned with who you can become. The apostle John informs us, "If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us." Learn from your mistakes and move on.

The third problem they faced is related to the failure of others. The just blamed the unjust because they were not more dedicated. They became discouraged because others did not serve God like they should. Remember, we are all under construction.

In verses 11-14, God reprimands His people regarding their impurity. Divine work must be done with clean hands. You have to set aside your sin. After doing some house cleaning, God reminds His people regarding His promises.

PROMISES

5 According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. 6 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; 7 And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. 8 The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. 9 The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.

Before beginning the task of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, God confirmed His promises to His people. (5) Those promises are as follows:

1. I made a covenant with you.
2. Do not forget that I am with you.
2. My Spirit is with you
 - a. Be strong
 - b. Do not fear

THE ROAD TO RESTORATION

God's promises served as a reminder that we are not alone to carry out the seeming impossible tasks to which we are called. Not only is God present, but His Spirit is made available to us to ensure that we can carry out divine work.

In verse 6, we encounter a prophecy. God declares, I am going to shake (6)

- a. The heavens
- b. The earth
- c. The Sea
- d. The nations

The treasure desired by all nations will come. (7) The temple will be filled with my glory. I have all the resources to carry this out. (8) The work that I will do in this house is greater than any prior work. I will put my peace in this place. God makes a connection between the work being done and the coming of the Messiah. God confirmed that their work was preparing the way for Christ.

Sometimes, we fail to understand the importance of our work. By making a connection between the work His people were doing and the coming of Jesus Christ, God is confirming the value of all divine work.

God is saying to His people, "your labor is valuable because it is connected to a higher purpose and plan."

Sometimes, we do not see how vital our labor is, but rest assured, it is indispensable to God's plan and must be done.

The last point to be discussed in chapter two is related to the potential of obedience.

THE ROAD TO RESTORATION

THE POTENTIAL OF OBEDIENCE

15 And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the LORD: 16 Since those days were, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the press fat for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty. 17 I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith the LORD. 18 Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the LORD'S temple was laid, consider it. 19 Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you.

The implications of this chapter are profound. In essence, God challenges His people to compare the difference between obedience and disobedience. God states, I want you to make a comparison (15-16)

1. What were things like when you lived in disobedience? (14 years)
2. How have things changed since **you began to obey? (3 months)**

God makes a powerful statement. The blessing begins the moment we make a move toward obedience. (18-19)

Before Obedience:

1. You looked for 20 measures of wheat and found only 10 measures.
2. You looked for vessels of fat and found only 20 vessels
3. The seed (vine, fig, pomegranate, olive) in your barn has not produced
4. From this day on, I will bless you.

God is inviting us to take action. He desires to demonstrate the difference between obedience and disobedience. The apostle Paul, in his epistles the Ephesians uses the phrase “in union with Christ” thirty five times. In his letter to the Colossians, he states, “in union with Christ, everything falls into proper place.” God’s message to His people is simple. Obedience pays dividends.

THE ROAD TO RESTORATION

Obedience is the way to God's best. God challenges His people, "from this on, I want you to compare the difference obedience makes."

In chapter two of this book, we are called to overcome the obstacles of the past and focus on the task at hand. Do not allow your failure to paralyze the work God wants to do through you. Do not allow the weakness of others to rob you of the miracles God wants to realize through you. Remember, you are never alone. Through obedience, you can begin to reap the blessing today.