

The Rebuilding of the Temple

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God desires to dwell with His people and reveal His glory to them.

BACKGROUND PASSAGES: Haggai; Ezra 4–6

Our pride can blind us from seeing our shortcomings, but the world is quick to point out when we slip and fall short. Nothing wounds our pride more than being called out for a sin we have committed. It's uncomfortable when anyone calls us out over our mistakes, but it's even more difficult when it's those who are close to us. We don't like anyone to know that we fall short and fail. This is why we often struggle to have real intimacy in community. We have Sunday School classes, community groups, life groups, and so on, but they are often lackluster. We hesitate to be honest and intimate because we don't want to be viewed as broken. We look around at everyone else who seems to have his or her life together, and we don't want to be the only one who doesn't have it together. But this isn't a healthy way to live, nor does it glorify God.



What are some of the results of harboring secret sins?

Group Time

Point 1: God confronts His people about their misplaced priorities (Hag. 1:2-6).

² “Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.” ³ 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? ⁵ Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. 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.

Notice in verse 2 that the Lord did not refer to the Israelites as “My people” but instead called them “**these people**.” It was a cold, distant descriptor and indicated from the very beginning of the prophet’s message that something was wrong. What could make God seem so distant and displeased with *these* people? They were unwilling to take the time to rebuild His temple.



What does delayed obedience say about a person’s view of God?

The people failed to focus on the Lord’s house because they focused on their own homes and provision. But in all the ways they tried to fill themselves, they only found themselves lacking. They were hungry, cold, and struggling. They were empty, and God connected their lack of fulfillment to their lack of faithfulness.



What are some ways we might be guilty of putting our own comfort ahead of obedience to God?



Voices from Church History

“The God of the universe has spoken, we believe what he says, and we will obey. We must make a decision that we will hold in the face of all opposition and apparent contradiction. The powers of hell can never prevail against the soul that takes its stand on God and on his Word.”¹

—Elisabeth Elliot (1926–2015)

Point 2: God encourages His people with His presence (Hag. 1:12-13).

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

Haggai preached, and the people listened. The word of the Lord through the prophet was heard, and the people responded in faith and obedience. This is a beautiful picture of repentance. It is also a reminder that obedience to the inspired Word of God is the visible evidence of a heart that follows God in faith (see Eph. 2:8-10; Jas. 2:17-18). To fear the Lord is to obey the Lord. So the evidence of our reverence and worship for God is our obedience to the Word that God has given to us.

Inspiration of Scripture: The inspiration of Scripture refers to God's _____ of the human authors of the Bible so that they _____ and _____ His message to humankind in their original writings.

In response to their obedience, God made a promise to His people that conveyed comfort and hope—"I am with you." God's presence is the ultimate promise to His people. It is our greatest promise because separation from God was the curse that resulted from Adam and Eve's great sin in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:23-24). Too often we get so caught up in the various blessings that God provides to us that we miss the greatest blessing of all, namely, God Himself, whom we know through Jesus Christ.

Christ's Exaltation: Christ was exalted when God _____ Him from the dead, and Christ was exalted when He _____ to the Father's right hand. He will be exalted by all creation when He _____. All of these aspects work together to magnify the glory and worth of Christ, resulting in the praise of the glory of His grace in rescuing _____.



How is God's presence with us in Christ meant to encourage us?

Point 3: God promises His people greater glory is to come (Hag. 2:6-9).

⁶ 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.’”

God once again spoke through the prophet Haggai to encourage His people as they rebuilt His temple. Though they were ill-equipped to give the Lord the temple He deserved among His creation, He promised to provide for its glory. The phrases “the heavens and the earth” and “the sea and the dry land” showed that everything would be affected by this movement of God. The ability of God to “shake” all the nations is a reminder of God’s omnipotence and authority. God is able to provide for His people, His temple, and His glory.

God promised to provide glory for His house in Jerusalem; He also promised to provide peace for His people in this place. God is the One who brings peace, and His people are to **practice peace** and to **pursue peace** in their communities (Col. 3:15).

- **Practice Peace:** The Christian is called to live moment by moment in the peace that God brings. There will be times when this is more challenging, and even unnatural. In those moments we have to discipline ourselves to trust God and rest in His peace. This is why we say that we have to practice peace. It’s not natural for any of us.
- **Pursue Peace:** In Jeremiah 29:4-7, God spoke to exiles who were living under Babylonian rule, telling them to settle into their foreign accommodations and to pray and work for the “welfare” of the cities in which they were living. The word “welfare” is the Hebrew word *shalom*. God calls His people to live in the peace that He brings and to do what they can to disseminate that peace wherever they go.



How can God’s peace on display in the lives of believers bring glory to God?

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Haggai 1:1-11

My kids are older now, and you would think they would grow out of this at some point, but bedtime can still be a struggle. They are professionals at postponing it as long as they can. The Israelites shared a similar capacity, which we see acknowledged in 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.”

God had called His people to rebuild the temple, and they kept saying that it was not the right time. In a real sense, they were repeating the same line that the serpent in the garden of Eden said to Eve when he tried to persuade her that God did not *really* say what He in fact did say. We can often be guilty of this, trying to obfuscate God’s revealed Word in an effort to avoid what He is calling us to do. Our response has to be repentance, faith, and obedience.



Voices from Church History

“No one can say yes to God’s ways who has said no to his promises and commandments. Acceptance of the will of God comes in the daily submission under his Word.”³

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer
(1906-1945)



How have you been guilty of pushing away obedience?

Day 2: Read Haggai 1:12-15

Notice the motivation for obedience from the Israelites: They feared the Lord and responded in obedience (v. 12). As followers of Jesus, we often misunderstand what our response should be when we recognize our disobedience. Too often we think the immediate response is just to do better. The problem is that doing better is not ultimately our reason for a lack of obedience.

The real reason that Christians don't obey is because we do not worship well. A true picture of God and ourselves leads to obedience. So the next time we find ourselves confronted by a lack of obedience, we ought to pay attention to the way we are disobeying, but the question of what we are worshiping ought to loom even larger in our minds.



How have you found that a lack of worship in your life leads to greater temptations to sin?

Day 3: Read Haggai 2:1-23

Recently my daughter celebrated her birthday. Leading up to her actual birthday, she was a bit upset because she had not received any birthday cards in the mail. What she didn't know was that her mom was confiscating them, waiting to give them to her on her birthday. Her mom was working, even when our daughter was unaware, because she wanted to surprise her with a big day.

In verse 6, Haggai reminds us that God's activity is not new. It is consistent with what He has done in the past. God is always at work. Always. Even when it seems God is silent, God is at work and is always on the move. This reality should simultaneously bring us both comfort and confidence.



When has God appeared to have been silent in your life but later, in hindsight, you were able to see that He was working?

Day 4: Read Ezra 4:1–5:17

There is a popular idea that floats around contemporary Christian circles that if we honor God, He will bless our efforts. In other words, if our hearts are pure and we are working in a way that honors God, our plans will succeed. These ideas are supported by various Scriptures (see Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:1-3). The problem is this is not always the case in Scripture. Sometimes those who are trying to honor God do succeed. Sometimes they ultimately succeed, but they often struggle in the meantime. And sometimes they seem to fail: They lose their lives; they are imprisoned. In this story, they ultimately succeed at building the temple, but not without great opposition, opposition that might often discourage us. In this story, God's people are strongly opposed, and often as they attempted to accomplish God's purposes. This should encourage us to be faithful in God's work even when difficulty comes.



In what ways have you experienced difficulty when trying to be faithful to God in the past? How does this encourage you to be faithful in the future?

Day 5: Read Ezra 6:1-22

I love the response of the Israelites in verse 16. They celebrated with joy. Far too often this kind of response to the work of God in our lives seems to be lacking. We focus on the difficulties of the faith or the challenges that we face in culture, and we fail to celebrate—to rest in the victories that God accomplishes.

There is something good about enjoying the results of God's faithfulness and our commitment to His work. When we celebrate these moments, we are participating in something of a precursor to our life in future glory, when we will celebrate forever the good life that comes with being present in the eternal kingdom of God. Celebration is a marker of the people of God, those who understand the depth of the sin and brokenness around them and in them and who are moved by the lengths to which God will go in the preservation of His kingdom. This is evidence of a God who is not distant but who is active among and loving toward us, a God who is worthy of our praise.



What has God done in your life that is worthy of your celebration? Take a moment today and celebrate His good work in your life.

