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Build My House: Haggai 1:1-15a:  
An Exhortation to Rebuild the Temple

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# Build My House

*Haggai 1:1-15a*

An Exhortation to Rebuild The Temple

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The passages in the Book of Haggai are clearly introduced with the date of each prophecy. This passage is introduced in 1:1 and the subsequent passage is introduced in 2:1. Therefore, 1:1-15 constitutes a passage. However, the final line of verse 15, "in the second year of King Darius," is probably the beginning of the introduction of the second prophecy. Verses 12-15 could be distinguished as a separate passage; however, I have chosen to include these verses as part of this passage because they describe the response of the people to Haggai's prophetic word.

## STUDY OF THE PASSAGE

### *Text and Translation*

**1:1** In the second year of King Darius, 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 son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the great priest: **2** Thus says the LORD of Armies: "This people says, 'Time has not yet come, time for the LORD's house to be built.'" **3** Then the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet: **4** "Is it time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses while this house is dried up?" **5** Now thus says the LORD of Armies: "Set your heart upon your ways. **6** You sow much, but bring in little; eat, but without satisfaction; drink, but without effect; put on clothes, but without warmth; and earn wages, but earned for a

pierced bag.” 7 Thus says the LORD of Armies: “Set your heart upon your ways. 8 Go up the mountain and bring down timber and build [my] house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” says the LORD. 9 “Looking for much, but behold, little. You brought the house and I blew on it. Why?” declares the LORD of Armies. “Because of my house, which is dried up, while you are running each to his own house. 10 Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth has withheld its produce 11 and I called for a drought on the earth, and on the mountains, and on the grain, and on the new wine, and on the oil, and on what the ground produces, and on man, and on beast, and on the labor of [your] hands.”

12 Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the great priest, and all the remnant of the people listened to the voice of the LORD their God and the words of Haggai the prophet, because the LORD their God had sent him and the people feared the LORD. 13 Then Haggai, the LORD’s messenger, with the message of the LORD to the people said: “I am with you,” declares the LORD.” 14 Then the LORD roused the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the great priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. So they came and began to work on the house of the LORD of Armies, their God, 15 on the twenty-fourth day, in the sixth month.

### ***Situation and Purpose***

The prophetic exhortations in this passage is addressed “to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the great priest.” However, the response to the prophecy suggests that the prophecy was for the remnant of the people. The passage reflects a situation in which the people have delayed the rebuilding of the temple. This situation is clearly reflected in the words put in the mouths of the people in verse 2, “This people says, ‘Time has not yet come, time for

the LORD's house to be built.'" Their neglect of the temple seems to have been caused by their preoccupation with their own houses. Their preoccupation is clearly implied in the rhetorical question in verse 3, "Is it time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses while this house is dried up?" Their preoccupation is also clearly implied in God's explanation of their dissatisfaction due to his judgment in verse 9, "Because of my house, which is dried up, while you are running each to his own house." The purpose of this prophetic word was to exhort and encourage Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the people of Judah and Jerusalem to listen to God and rebuild his temple rather than being preoccupied with their own houses.

### ***Literary Context and Role***

The passage is the first in a series of prophecies in Haggai that are arranged in chronological order. This prophecy is dated the first day of the sixth month of the second year of King Darius. However, this passage also relates that the people listened to God's word and began work on the temple on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month of the second year of King Darius. Subsequent prophecies are dated the twenty-first day of the seventh month (2:1-9) and the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month (2:10-19 and 2:20-23). The role of this passage was to encourage God's people to begin God's work. The role of the subsequent passages was to encourage God's people to continue to do God's work in spite of disappointment and discouragement (2:1-9), to repent of their defilement and return to the LORD (2:10-19), and to encourage the leaders of God's people as they direct God's work (2:20-23).

### ***Form and Function***

The passage can be generally classified as a prophetic exhortation. Exhortation can be generally defined as commands and/or prohibitions

reinforced with reasons and explanations. The commands and prohibitions indicate the appropriate response. The reasons provide the rationale for obedience. The explanations clarify the appropriate response or rationale. However, sometimes there are no commands or prohibitions or the commands or prohibitions do not fully indicate the appropriate response. In these cases, the appropriate responses must be supplied or supplemented by implication from the reasons or explanations. This passage does contain commands in verses 5 and 7-8. The command in verse 5 that is repeated in verse 7 does not indicate the appropriate response and instead introduces reasons for obeying the commands in verse 8. The three commands in verse 8 clearly indicate the appropriate response. "Go up the mountain and bring down timber and build [my] house." This passage contains numerous reasons for building the temple.

Though the passage can be generally classified as exhortation, the exhortation is placed within a narrative framework that concludes with an account of the response of the people to the exhortation and God assuring them of his presence and rousing their spirits in verses 12-15. Narrative communicates a message as the readers identify with the characters and their situation and learn from their experience as the plot develops. In this passage, the readers are intended to identify with the people and follow their example as they listened to and obeyed the message of God through Haggai. They are encouraged to do so based on the same reasons that the people listened and obeyed as well as the positive benefits that resulted.

### ***Strategy and Structure***

The passage is arranged in chronological order. Haggai exhorts the people of Judah and Jerusalem to begin work on the temple and they obey the word of the LORD. This simple strategy confronts the readers with the word of the LORD and challenges them to obey the word of the LORD

like the people of Haggai's time. The date, source, and recipients of the word of the LORD are introduced in verse 1. The heart of the word of the LORD is the command to rebuild the temple in verse 8. This command is reinforced based on the inappropriateness of delaying work on the temple (2-4), the dissatisfaction and disappointment that have resulted (5-7, 9-11), and the possibility of pleasing and honouring God (8). The response of the people to the word of the LORD also reinforces this command not only through their example but also because of their reasons for obedience (12) and the results of their obedience (13-15).

- I. The Word of the LORD (1:1-11)
  - A. The Date, Source, and Recipients of the Word of the LORD (1)
  - B. The Inappropriateness of Failing to Build the Temple (2-4)
    - 1. The excuse of the people (2)
    - 2. The rebuke of the LORD (3-4)
  - C. The Dissatisfaction of the People (5-7)
    - 1. Introductory command (5)
    - 2. Their dissatisfaction (6)
    - 3. Concluding command (7)
  - D. Exhortation to Build the Temple (8)
  - E. Explanation of the Dissatisfaction of the People (9-11)
    - 1. The dissatisfaction of the people (9a)
    - 2. The reason for their dissatisfaction (9b)
    - 3. The reason for God's judgment (9c)
    - 4. The results of their disobedience (10-11)
- II. The People Listen to Haggai and Begin Work on the Temple (12-15)
  - A. The People Listen to Haggai because the LORD Sent Him and They Feared the LORD (12)
  - B. The LORD Assures the People of His Presence among Them (13)
  - C. The LORD Rouses the Spirit of the People and They Begin Work on the Temple (14-15)

### ***Message or Messages***

God's people should do God's work because it is inappropriate for them to be preoccupied with their own interests while God's work is not done. Failure to obey God's word results in dissatisfaction; obeying God's word will please and honour him: The LORD their God has spoken and they fear him; God will be with them if they do what he says; and God will rouse their spirits to do what he says.

## **ANALYSIS OF THE DETAILS**

### ***The Word of the LORD through Haggai***

The word of the LORD through Haggai is found in verses 1-11. This word of the LORD is a prophetic exhortation. This prophetic exhortation is introduced in verse 1. The command to build the temple does not occur until verse 8. The remainder of this prophetic exhortation reinforces this command with reasons for beginning work on the temple.

**The date, source, and recipients of the word of the LORD.** The date, source, and recipients of the word of the LORD are introduced in verse 1, "In the second year of King Darius, 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 son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the great priest." The date of Haggai's prophetic word is significant. Work on the temple had ceased for a considerable time (Ezra 4:24). God's word through Haggai was the catalyst for the renewal of work on the temple. The source of Haggai's prophetic word is emphasized throughout this passage and the book. On eleven occasions in this passage alone Haggai's prophetic word is identified as a word of the LORD or the LORD of Armies. Indeed, in this verse it is stressed that Haggai was just a channel of God's word ("by the hand of Haggai").

God's word was addressed to Zerubbabel and Joshua; however, it was probably intended for all the people of Judah and Jerusalem and the leaders were supposed to pass the word on to them. Indeed, verse 12 indicates that "all the remnant of the people listened to the voice of the LORD their God and the words of Haggai the prophet."

**The inappropriateness of failing to build the temple.** The LORD encourages the people of Judah and Jerusalem to rebuild the temple through Haggai by rebuking them for their failure to do so in verses 2-4. He begins by quoting the excuse of the people for failing to complete the temple in verse 2, "Thus says the LORD of Armies: 'This people says, Time has not yet come, time for the LORD's house to be built.'" Referring to them as "This people" rather than "My people" probably already implies God's displeasure with them. He then rebukes them with a rhetorical question in verses 3-4, "Then the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet: 'Is it time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses while this house is dried up?'" This is the type of rhetorical question that implies an emphatic negative response. Therefore, it is equivalent to the exclamation, "It is not time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses while this house is dried up!" Indeed, this rhetorical question stresses the irony of the situation. Irony describes a circumstance that is contrary to what is expected to emphasize how extraordinary the circumstance is. In this case, the people are living in paneled houses while the LORD's house is dried up. The extraordinary inappropriateness of such a circumstance is obvious. The extraordinary inappropriateness is emphasized in the Hebrew text by doubling the pronoun (translated "you yourselves"). Admittedly, the word translated as "paneled" literally means "covered" (Brown, Driver, Briggs, 706) and may simply mean that their houses have roofs and are habitable. Nonetheless, they were placing a priority on their houses as



opposed to the house of “the LORD of Armies.” The temple is probably referred to as the LORD’s house to correspond with their houses. Through this rebuke, the readers are led to recognize the inappropriateness of their preoccupation with their own interests while God’s work is left undone. Therefore, God’s people should do God’s work because it is inappropriate for them to be preoccupied with their own interests when God’s work is not done.

**The dissatisfaction of the people.** The LORD encourages the people to build the temple through Haggai by pointing out the dissatisfaction and disappointment that have resulted from failing to complete the temple in verses 5-7 and 9-11. He points out their dissatisfaction in verses 5-6. He begins with a command that compels them to carefully evaluate their experience in verse 5, “Now thus says the LORD of Armies: ‘Set your heart upon your ways.’” This command appeals to them to take their experience to heart (NIV “Give careful thought to your ways”). The adverb translated “Now” is probably included to stress the urgency of carefully evaluating their experience. He then describes their experience of dissatisfaction in verse 6, “You sow much, but bring in little; eat, but without satisfaction; drink, but without effect; put on clothes, but without warmth; and earn wages, but earned for a pierced bag.” This is precisely what the LORD warned would happen to them if they disobeyed when they renewed the covenant on Mount Ebal in the wilderness (see especially Deuteronomy 28:18, 22-23, 38-40, and 51). He repeats his command to carefully evaluate their experience in verse 7, “Thus says the LORD of Armies: ‘Set your heart upon your ways.’” He explains the reason for their dissatisfaction in verses 9-11. First, he describes briefly their experience of dissatisfaction in verse 9a, “Looking for much, but behold, little.” Second, he explains that their dissatisfaction is a direct result of God’s judgment in 9b, “You brought the house and I blew on it.” Though the language is ambiguous,

it clearly indicates God's judgment upon them and that which they placed as a priority above his house. The picture may be that God blew a scorching wind that dried up their houses in accordance with the imagery used in verses 10-11. Third, he explains that the cause of his judgment was their neglect of the temple in verse 9c, "Why?" declares the LORD of Armies. 'Because of my house, which is dried up, while you are running each to his own house.'" Their busy and self-centred preoccupation with their own interests is emphasized in the Hebrew text. The participle translated as "running" stresses their busyness with their own interests. They were in a hurry when it came to their own interests. Their self-centredness is stressed by a common use of the noun meaning "man" (translated "each to his own house" and literally "a man to his own house"). The inappropriateness of their self-centred busyness is stressed in contrast to their inactivity with regard to the temple. Finally, he describes the results of their failure to build the temple in verses 10-11, "Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth has withheld its produce and I called for a drought on the earth, and on the mountains, and on the grain, and on the new wine, and on the oil, and on what the ground produces, and on man, and on beast, and on the labor of [your] hands." This is again precisely what the LORD warned would happen to them if they disobeyed when they renewed the covenant on Mount Ebal in the wilderness (see especially Deuteronomy 28:18, 22-23, 38-40, and 51). This judgment would certainly be ironically appropriate. They have been preoccupied with their own houses and allowed God's house to dry up. As a result, their houses have dried up. This ironically appropriate judgment is more explicit in the Hebrew text where there is a play on words between the word translated as "dried up" in verses 4 and 9 (*hareb*) and the word translated as "drought" in verse 11 (*horeb*). Through the dissatisfaction that has resulted from their failure to build the temple, the readers are warned of the consequences of failing to listen to God's word and do his

work. Therefore, God's people should do God's work because failure to do God's work results in dissatisfaction.

**Exhortation to build the temple.** The LORD exhorts the people of Judah and Jerusalem through Haggai to build the temple in verse 8, “Go up the mountain and bring down timber and build [my] house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,’ says the LORD.” Two verbs provide motivation for obedience to the commands in the first half of the verse. First, the verb translated as “take pleasure” means “be pleased with, accept favorably” (Brown, Driver, Briggs, 953). As Taylor observes, this word “is part of the theological vocabulary of the Hebrew Bible; it is often used to signify the Lord’s acceptance of persons and sacrificial offerings” (Taylor, 129). Thus, building the temple is an act of service to God that he will accept with pleasure. Second, the verb translated as “be honored” literally means “heavy, weighty” and in a derived sense “honored” (Brown, Driver, Briggs, 457). Thus, building the temple is an act of devotion that expresses their reverence for God and causes others to acknowledge his greatness. Through this exhortation, the readers are also encouraged to listen to God’s word and do his work. Therefore, God’s people should do God’s work so that they will please and honour him.

**The people listen to Haggai and begin work on the temple.** The response of the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the word of the LORD is narrated in verses 12-15. Through the example of the people, the readers are encouraged to obey the word of the LORD like them based on their reasons for obedience, the LORD’s assurance that he would be with them, and the LORD’s rousing of their spirits to begin the work.

**The people listen to Haggai because the LORD sent him and they feared the LORD.** The people of Judah and Jerusalem listen to Haggai

because the LORD sent him and they feared the LORD as indicated in verse 12, “Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the great priest, and all the remnant of the people listened to the voice of the LORD their God and the words of Haggai the prophet, because the LORD their God had sent him and the people feared the LORD.” The response of the people serves as a model for later readers of this narrative. Their response was unanimous. Not just the leaders but “all the remnant of the people listened to the voice of the LORD their God and the words of the prophet Haggai.” The verb translated as “listened” often denotes more than just attentiveness to what is being said. In fact, it is sometimes even translated as “obeyed” (see NIV). Indeed, verse 14 relates that “they came and began to work on the house of the LORD of Armies, their God.” They are described as having two reasons for listening and obeying. First, they believed that the words that Haggai spoke were in fact the words of the LORD their God. In fact, the passage emphasizes repeatedly that Haggai is simply passing on the words of the LORD of Armies. Second, they listened and obeyed because they feared the LORD. The verb translated as “feared” is translated in a variety of ways in the Old Testament. It may be translated as “be terrified” or “stand in awe of” or even “reverence” (Brown, Driver, Briggs, 431). A common tendency is to soften the meaning of this word; however, there is a place in biblical faith for a healthy fear of God. Through the response of the people and their motivation, the readers are led to listen to God’s word like them. Therefore, God’s people should do God’s work because the LORD their God has spoken and they fear him.

**The LORD assures the people of his presence among them.** The LORD assures the people of Judah and Jerusalem, through Haggai, of his presence among them in verse 13, “Then Haggai, the LORD’s messenger, with the message of the LORD to the people said: ‘I am with

you,' declares the LORD." The assurance of God's presence is a recurring theme in the Old Testament. Through God's presence in their lives, the people of the Old Testament were able to endure difficulties and overcome challenges. Indeed, when faced with the prospect of entering into the Promised Land without the Presence of the LORD, Moses beseeched God, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here" (Ex. 33:15). God's presence was so essential to Moses that he did not want to face the difficulties and challenges of Canaan without him. Through this assurance, the readers are also encouraged to obey God's word. Therefore, God's people should do God's work because God will be with them if they do his work.

**The LORD rouses the spirit of the people and they begin work on the temple.** The LORD rouses the spirit of the people of Judah and Jerusalem and they begin work on the temple in verses 14-15, "Then the LORD roused the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the great priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. So they came and began to work on the house of the LORD of Armies, their God, on the twenty-fourth day, in the sixth month." The verb translated as "roused" implies the image of waking someone from sleep. Indeed, the people had long been dormant in their efforts to build the temple. God also roused the spirit of Cyrus to release the people from exile (Ezra 1:1) and the spirits of those who chose to return to Judah (Ezra 1:5). Though the people had already listened to God, they were evidently hindered by long years of inactivity. This inertia may account for the delay of 23 days between the proclamation of God's word by Haggai and the initiation of work on the temple. Nonetheless, God provided them with the stimulus they needed to overcome their inertia. Through this result, the readers are also encouraged to obey God's word. Therefore, God's people should do God's work because God will rouse their spirits to do his work.

## **APPLICATION OF THE MESSAGE**

### ***Establishing Correspondence***

The passage reflects a situation in which the people have delayed the rebuilding of the temple. Their neglect of the temple seems to have been caused by their preoccupation with their own houses. Christians today also delay doing God's work because of their preoccupation with their own interests. This correspondence between the original and modern situation provides a strong basis for applying the message of this passage to the modern context.

### ***Distinguishing the Contextualized***

This passage does contain some contextualized elements. God is not telling Christians to "Go up the mountain and bring down timber and build [my] house." Nonetheless, this command can be generalized or related to contextual equivalents. Even within Haggai, the message has been recorded for people for whom the temple was a completed reality. Therefore, the statement of the message of the passage that follows has only been modified slightly.

### ***Adjusting the Message***

Christians should do God's work because it is inappropriate for them to be preoccupied with their own interests while God's work is not done; failure to do God's work results in dissatisfaction; doing God's work will please and honour him; the LORD their God has spoken and they fear him; God will be with them if they do his work; and God will rouse their spirits to do his work.

## COMMUNICATION OF THE MESSAGE

**Title:** Build My House

**Objective:** The objective of this message is to exhort and encourage Christians to do the work of God rather than be preoccupied with their own interests.

**Proposition:** Christians should do God's work because it is inappropriate for them to be preoccupied with their own interests while God's work is not done; failure to do God's work results in dissatisfaction; doing God's work will please and honor him; God has spoken and they fear him; God will be with them if they do his work; and God will rouse their spirits to do his work.

### *Introduction*

Christians today often delay doing God's work because of their preoccupation with their own interests. Similarly, the people delayed the rebuilding of the temple. Their neglect of the temple seems to have been caused by their preoccupation with their own houses. They were saying that the time had not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD; however, the truth of the matter was that they were busy with their own houses. Haggai proclaims the word of the LORD to them and they respond by listening to and obeying the word of the LORD in Haggai 1:1-15. We need to hear this word of the LORD and follow their example so that we have divine rather than human priorities. *Read Haggai 1:1-15.*

- I. Christians should do God's work because it is inappropriate for them to be preoccupied with their own interests while God's work is not done.
  - A. The LORD encourages the people of Judah and Jerusalem to build the temple by rebuking them for their preoccupation with their own interests and neglect of the temple in verses 2-4.

- B. He begins by quoting the excuse of the people for failing to complete the temple in verse 2.
  - C. He then rebukes them with a rhetorical question in verses 3-4.
  - D. Illustration
  - E. Application
- II. Christians should do God's work because failure to do God's work results in dissatisfaction.
- A. The LORD encourages the people of Judah and Jerusalem through Haggai to build the temple by pointing out the dissatisfaction that has resulted from their failure to do so in verses 5-7 and 9-11.
  - B. First, he commands them to carefully evaluate their experience in verse 5 and again in verse 7.
  - C. Second, he describes their experience of dissatisfaction in verse 6.
  - D. Third, he explains that their dissatisfaction is a direct result of their preoccupation with their own interests and neglect of the temple in verse 9.
  - E. Finally, he describes the results of their failure to build the temple in verses 10-11.
  - F. Illustration
  - G. Application
- III. Christians should do God's work because doing God's work will please and honour him.
- A. The LORD commands the people to build the temple through Haggai in verse 8.
  - B. They are exhorted to build the temple in order to please God.
  - C. They are exhorted to build the temple in order that God will be honoured.
  - D. Illustration
  - E. Application



- IV. Christians should do God's work because the LORD their God has spoken and they fear him.
- A. The people listen to the LORD in verse 12.
  - B. The response of the people serves as a model for later readers of this narrative.
  - C. They are described as having two reasons for obeying. First, they believed that the words that Haggai spoke were in fact the voice of the LORD their God. Second, they listened and obeyed because they feared the LORD.
  - D. Illustration
  - E. Application
- V. Christians should listen to the word of the LORD and do their part to build his church because God will be with them if they do what he says.
- A. One of the results of the obedience of the people to the word of the LORD is described in verse 13.
  - B. Illustration
  - C. Application
- VI. Christians should do God's work because God will rouse their spirits to do his work.
- A. Another result of the people's obedience to the word of the LORD is described in verses 14-15.
  - B. The verb translated "roused" implies the image of waking someone from sleep. Indeed, the people had long been dormant in their efforts to build the temple
  - C. Application

## **CONCLUSION**

Christians today often delay doing God's work because of their preoccupation with their own interests. Similarly, the people of Judah and Jerusalem delayed the rebuilding of the temple. Their neglect of the temple seems to have been caused by their preoccupation with their own houses. They were saying that the time had not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD; however, they were busy with their own houses. Haggai proclaims the word of the LORD to them and they respond with obedience in Haggai 1:1-15. We need to hear this word of the LORD and follow their example so that we have divine rather than human priorities. You should do God's work because it is wrong for you to be preoccupied with your own interests while God's work is not done; failure to do God's work results in dissatisfaction; doing God's work will please and honour him; the LORD your God has spoken and you fear him; God will be with you if you do his work; and God will rouse your spirits to do his work.