Build What Lasts

The Kingdom Message of Haggai

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Adapted from four sermons on the book of Haggai

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A Note to the Reader

The book of Haggai is short, but its message is not small. These four chapters are adapted from my Haggai sermons: Kingdom Priority, Kingdom Perspective, Kingdom Purity, and Kingdom Promise. I have joined two versions of the opening sermon into one chapter and shaped the spoken messages into continuous prose. Read the passages alongside these reflections. Haggai spoke to a particular people rebuilding the temple after exile; the applications here ask what their story teaches those of us who follow Jesus today.

What are we building with the time we have been given? Haggai helps us ask that question honestly. He calls God's people to put his purposes first, keep going when they are discouraged, seek a clean heart rather than trust in religious activity, and hold fast to a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Chapter 1 — Kingdom Priority

Haggai 1:1–15

The people of Judah had returned from exile to a city in ruins. They began rebuilding the temple, but opposition came and the work stopped. Years passed. Their own houses were receiving attention while the Lord's house still lay unfinished. By the time Haggai spoke, a delay had become a way of life.

The people had an explanation: the time had not yet come to rebuild. Haggai answered with a question that went beneath their schedule. How was there time for their own houses while the house of the Lord lay in ruins? He was not condemning a family for having a home. He was exposing a heart that had made room for its own comfort and pushed God's purpose to the margins.

That is how kingdom drift often happens. We do not wake up and announce that we are turning away from God. We tell ourselves that we will give him our attention after the next deadline, the next purchase, or the next season of life. Meanwhile, our energy shows what we have actually placed first. Haggai's repeated instruction is to consider our ways. Look at what fills your days. Where is your strength going? What has received your best while your calling has been left waiting?

The prophet describes a people who sow much but harvest little, who earn wages only to put them into a bag with holes. In Haggai's own setting, these hardships are connected to God's covenant dealings with Judah. We should not turn them into a formula that explains every

financial hardship today. The searching question remains: even when we gain what we have been chasing, does it give the life we expected?

Jesus asks something similar in Mark 8: what does it profit someone to gain the whole world and lose his soul? A life spent only on our own small kingdom will never be enough. We were made to know God and to participate in what he is doing. He does not need our labor to make his name great, yet he graciously invites us into his work.

Haggai did not leave the people with an abstract feeling of guilt. The Lord told them to go up to the hills, bring wood, and build. Repentance took the shape of an action. The leaders and the people listened, and God answered with a promise: he was with them. That is the invitation for us as well. Consider your ways, turn toward the Lord, and take the next faithful step with the time and resources he has given you.

Chapter 2 — Kingdom Perspective

Haggai 2:1–9; Ezra 3:12–13

The people returned to work, but another difficulty soon appeared. Some remembered Solomon's temple and saw the new one as nothing by comparison. Ezra describes a moment when the joy of those celebrating the foundation mingled with the weeping of those who remembered the former house. Both sounds were real. The past held beauty and loss, and the present held a beginning that did not yet look impressive.

We understand that feeling. A church remembers a season when everything seemed full of life. A family looks back on easier years. A person compares the work God has given them with what someone else has built. Gratitude for the past can slowly become a conviction that God could never work through what stands before us now. Discouragement then begins to shape how we speak, and it can spread to the people beside us.

Remembering is good. Israel was taught to remember the Lord's faithfulness. The trouble begins when memory becomes a rearview mirror we cannot stop watching. We miss the work in front of us because it does not resemble what we knew before. We can even become so attached to a familiar form that we forget the purpose it once served.

God's answer to the builders was direct: be strong and work, for he was with them. He addressed Zerubbabel, Joshua the high priest, and all the people. He did not ask them to pretend that their disappointment was foolish. He gave them a stronger reason to continue than the size or appearance of the new temple: his Spirit remained in their midst. They could act with courage because they were not alone.

The Lord also promised that the latter glory of the house would be greater and that he would give peace. The people could not see the full reach of God's purposes from where they stood. Neither can we. Our faith is not that every new project will surpass an old one by the measures we prefer. It is that God sees more than we see, and he remains faithful while we do the work entrusted to us.

When a church is tempted to stop because it misses yesterday, it can ask what has stayed constant. We still seek God's glory. We still proclaim Christ, make disciples, and serve our neighbors. The forms that carry out that calling may change. Hold to the mission, give thanks for what God has done, and make room to recognize what he is doing now. Be strong. Do the work before you. He is with his people.

Chapter 3 — Kingdom Purity

Haggai 2:10–19; Titus 2:11–14

Once the people were building again, Haggai brought a different question to the priests. If a garment carrying holy meat touched ordinary food, would that food become holy? The priests said no. If someone made unclean by contact with a dead body touched the food, would it become unclean? They said yes. Haggai used those answers to confront a deeper problem: the people's work and offerings could not make them holy simply because they were working on a holy building.

It is easy to confuse being near sacred things with being right with God. We can attend worship, teach, give, and serve, and then begin to think that those actions make God owe us his approval. Religious work is a gift and a calling, but it cannot cleanse the heart that does the work. A temple can be rebuilt while the builders still need to turn toward the Lord.

This is one reason we must be careful with the language of blessing. Haggai records a specific promise to his people after their renewed obedience. It does not authorize a bargain in which we perform enough religious tasks and God must give us health or material success. Nor does it mean every suffering believer has failed to serve him properly. Grace cannot be earned by stacking stones, filling a schedule, or comparing ourselves favorably with someone else.

Paul's words in Titus 2 help us see the Christian life more clearly. The grace of God brings salvation and trains us to turn from ungodliness and live for him. Grace is not merely the way into faith before we start climbing a ladder of our own achievements. The same grace that saves us teaches us to live differently. It changes our motives as well as our behavior.

Fear may tell us that we must work harder so God will finally love us. Pride may tell us that our work makes us better than others. Neither is a clean foundation for service. Christ calls us to receive his mercy, confess what is wrong, and offer our lives to him from a grateful heart. Good works then become the fruit of grace, rather than the price of it.

So consider not only what you are doing for God, but what is happening within you. Are you serving from love, or trying to make him your debtor? Are you seeking his holiness, or just a reputation for being busy? The Lord desires more than hands at work. He calls for hearts that belong to him.

Chapter 4 — Kingdom Promise

Haggai 2:20–23; Hebrews 12:25–29

Haggai's final message was addressed to Zerubbabel, the governor. The Lord promised to shake the heavens and the earth and overthrow the strength of earthly kingdoms. Then he gave Zerubbabel a startling image: he would make him like a signet ring, a mark of chosen authority. After the exile and the collapse of Judah's monarchy, this was a word of hope for someone serving amid ruins.

The rebuilt temple would not be the whole story. God had not forgotten his promises, including the promise bound up with David's house. Matthew's genealogy later names Zerubbabel in the family line leading to Jesus. We can look back from Christ and see that God's faithfulness was reaching farther than those builders could have known. Their work mattered, but the kingdom of God would not depend on the permanence of the stones they were placing.

The New Testament takes up Haggai's language of shaking. Hebrews 12 points to the passing away of what can be shaken and calls believers to gratitude for a kingdom that cannot be shaken. That is a word both of warning and of comfort. We should not build our hope on status, comfort, institutions, or power as though they could last forever. But when the world feels uncertain, we can receive a kingdom whose King remains faithful.

The sermon that first carried this message looked ahead to the defeat of evil and the return of Christ. Scripture does not ask us to minimize either judgment or hope. The Lord will set things right. Revelation's vision of a new heaven and a new earth ends with God dwelling with his people and wiping away every tear. The promise is not that our efforts today will never be tested. It is that Christ will bring his people into a future no earthly kingdom can create.

What, then, are you building? Haggai begins by asking us to reconsider our priorities and ends by lifting our eyes beyond the work of our own hands. Put God first. Keep working when the present seems small. Let grace purify the heart behind the work. And invest your life in the kingdom that will remain when everything else has been shaken.