

David Meiklejohn

20 June 2021

# A Room Without a Roof

## Haggai 1

### Introduction

The singer Pharell Williams has a song called Happy. It became a major hit and has been used in movies. There's a line in it which I found a bit strange though. It goes "Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof". I don't know that I've ever felt like a room without a roof, but I guess he's thinking about what it would be like to sleep under the stars. The trouble is that's only a nice prospect if the weather is fine. If it's cold or rainy then it's a different matter.

My father-in-law decided a number of years ago to build a second story to his bungalow. He built it alongside the house until it was ready to lift on, and the old roof come off. He hired a crane and spent a day taking the roof off. The next day he would put the new roof on, complete with rooms. It rained that night. Heavily. The family were left standing in the living room trying to catch running water in buckets, but it was coming in everywhere so it was a hopeless task.

You see there are dangers in a house that isn't finished. And that's where we arrive with the message from the prophet Haggai.

### Context

We've been working through the book of Nehemiah on Sunday mornings, and we've taken a break for a few weeks of individual sermons. However we've continued with the subject of building. Walter took us through Jesus prayer during the last supper, where he prayed for his disciples then and in the future. He was looking ahead to the building up of the church as it would grow from Jerusalem to Judea, to Galilee, and to the nations. Will looked back at Ezra last week as we thought about the first Jews returning to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon, and how they had first rebuilt the altar, followed by the temple before Nehemiah started on the walls of the city.

Today we're sitting in a gap. The temple building work was started, but the people got dissuaded as their enemies plotted against them. So they stopped, and the temple sat unfinished for 18 years. Haggai was sent by God to encourage the Israelites back to work

### Prophet, Priest and King

As we start the chapter we see an interesting gathering in verse one:

*In the second year of Darius the king, 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 the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest: [Haggai 1v1]*

Here we have Haggai the prophet, Zerubbabel the governor: who as Will told us last week was the heir to the throne - he should have been the king. And we have Joshua the son of the high priest. This threesome of prophet, priest and king are a picture of the Messiah who was to come. He would take on the role of prophet as he brought God's message to the people. He would be priest as he made sacrifice for the people. And he would be king in an eternal reign over his people. So maybe there's a hint at the start of this book that it will be partly Messianic in nature.

## **The Problem**

*“Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord.” Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, “Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?. [Haggai 1v2-4]*

Verse 2 states the problem in a nutshell: “these people say the time has not yet come to rebuild”. It had been 18 years since the building had stopped. So when would the time be right? When their own houses were built? When the crop was harvested? When they were well fed? When they were properly clothed? When their jobs allowed it?

Do these excuses sound familiar? When will you have time to serve the Lord, to build his house?

- When you get yourself settled and secure?
- When your family are all provided for?
- When you're comfortable in life?
- When your work is done and retirement gives you some spare time?

Many Christians spend their life promising God they'll serve him when they get the time, or when they have their life sorted. I know, I've said the same thing at times. And all these things are important. Financial security, family, career, they're all important things. But they shouldn't come before God.

When God introduced the tithing system into the law of Moses, there was one very important rule: the gift to God was to be the first fruits of the harvest. They were to give to God first, then enjoy the fruits of the harvest he had given them.

So...

## **Consider Your Ways**

*Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. 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. [Haggai 1v5-6]*

For those of you who work in any sort of business, you'll know that there's a word that will strike fear into the hearts of the toughest manager: audit. When word gets round that your team is to be audited there's a general panic. Old documents are dusted off and revised, all

the processes are gone over to check you're following them. The team are briefed on what to say to the auditors and what not to mention under any circumstance.

And yet it should be something that is welcomed. An audit is a chance to look at yourself and spot any problems. To see where things need corrected. A chance to "consider your ways".

That's what the Lord wanted the Israelites to do: consider their ways. He then goes through a list of all the endeavours they're working at. And surprise! They're not succeeding at anything. Their crops aren't producing enough, they're going hungry, they don't have enough clothing to keep themselves warm. Even those that are being paid wages, it's as if those wages just disappear.

If they're waiting until they get their lives sorted they're in for a long wait. Nothing seems to be going well. Why?

### **Diagnosis and Prescription**

*"Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the Lord. You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors." [Haggai 1:9-11]*

The Lord says "consider your ways" again. This is the result of the audit. The findings are about to be announced and there are some big problems that need to be sorted.

The main issue is simply one of priorities. The people have been placing themselves before God. His house has lain neglected, half-built, while they try to deal with their own situations. The Lord says it is he that has caused them to have difficulties. It is because of him that the harvests have failed and they've struggled. Why did he do this? To bring them back to him.

The solution is simple: an act of repentance. The Israelites should turn around from their self-serving ways and put God first. As verse 8 says, go into the hills and bring wood to build the house of God. Notice the purpose behind it: that God may be glorified. This should be something that is a priority in each of our lives. We've been studying Psalm 67 in the family service, and the psalmist here asks God to be gracious to them, to bless them, to cause his face to shine upon them. Not for their sake, but so that God may be glorified among the nations.

If we can examine ourselves and look at our priorities in life and see that they need altered, that's good news. All we need to do is refocus, re-order, and put God first in our daily walk.

### **Response and Result**

How did the Jews respond?

*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. [Haggai 1 v 12]*

It sounds easy, doesn't it? All they did was obey the word of the Lord. But there's a commitment involved here. The people have decided together to place their trust in God. They've been struggling to bring in enough crops to feed themselves, but now they're going to rebuild the temple and trust God to feed them. They're going to put less effort into their own endeavours, and trust that God will reward them with greater results.

We have a good God who honours our dedication to his work. He does reward those who serve him, and he looks after his children. What was the Lord's response?

*Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message, "I am with you, declares the Lord." [Haggai 1 v 13]*

I like this. God doesn't wait for the people to finish the work before he blesses them. He's not looking for results, he's looking for willing servants. And as soon as the people determine to start working on the temple again, God's message is "I am with you".

Remember why they stopped the work? Their opponents had started rumours, written letters and caused it to be dangerous for them to continue. And yet Haggai doesn't mention any of this. The matter is between the people and God. If they obey him, he will be with them. And no circumstance or outside interference can stop them.

## **Application**

We can take a lesson from this passage. God is looking for his children to put him first, to serve him first, and to trust him to supply their needs. As we "consider our ways" we can look for areas in our life where we are putting self before God. When we find these areas it's simply a matter of applying the old children's chorus:

J-O-Y, J-O-Y, this is what it means: Jesus first, yourself last and others in between.

If you go ahead and read chapter 2 you'll find something that Will mentioned last week. Some of the older people, who had seen Solomon's temple in its day, were disheartened that the new building was going to be smaller and less impressive. Haggai encourages them with another word from the Lord:

*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." [Haggai 2v9]*

In later days this second temple would be expanded by Herod the Great. So it would be more impressive than when it was first built. However, more significantly, the Son of God himself would come to this very building, and grace it with his presence. It is he who will bring peace: our prophet, priest and king.