

The Rebuilding of the Temple

Summary and Goal

In this session we will consider how God's promise of His presence is a primary motivator to obedience. Too often we think of obedience in the Christian life as perfunctory behavior that seems mundane. This text reminds us that obedience is the natural response to the presence of God, and the presence of God in the people's rebuilding of the temple in Haggai points forward to the ultimate act of God's presence being known in the coming of Jesus. This Old Testament book will prove relevant to us as we realize that we are living out the same promise and commitment as the Israelites did in the context of Haggai.

Session Outline

1. God confronts His people about their misplaced priorities (Hag. 1:2-6).
2. God encourages His people with His presence (Hag. 1:12-13).
3. God promises His people greater glory is to come (Hag. 2:6-9).

Background Passages: Haggai; Ezra 4-6

Session in a Sentence

God desires to dwell with His people and reveal His glory to them.

Christ Connection

When the people obeyed God and continued rebuilding the temple, God promised that the glory of the temple would be greater than that of the first. This promise was fulfilled in Jesus, who emptied Himself by assuming the form of a servant to provide peace so God could dwell with His people and reveal His glory.

Missional Application

Because God has forgiven our sin and dwells within us, we live in a way that shows God is our priority so others may see His glory.

Group Time

GROUP MEMBER CONTENT

Introduction

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 75) to identify a familiar dynamic in our lives: While sin is common to us all, we are nonetheless uncomfortable when others know how we fall short.

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.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



What are some of the results of harboring secret sins? (we put distance between ourselves and others, and even between ourselves and God; we struggle to love others and be loved by them because we are fearful of being known; our worship is hollow; we feel guilt and shame; we struggle to encourage others in faithful living; we struggle to share the gospel)

SAY: The following passages in Haggai show us a prideful Israelite people who feared the same sort of things as we do. God brought to light that the Israelites had put their hope and faith in other things, which was uncomfortable, and yet, God was quick to welcome them back if they would repent and obey.

SUMMARIZE: In this session we will consider how God's promise of His presence is a primary motivator to obedience. Too often we think of obedience in the Christian life as perfunctory behavior that seems mundane. This text reminds us that obedience is the natural response to the presence of God, and the presence of God in the people's rebuilding of the temple in Haggai points forward to the ultimate act of God's presence being known in the coming of Jesus. This Old Testament book will prove relevant to us as we realize that we are living out the same promise and commitment as the Israelites did in the context of Haggai.

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

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Haggai 1:2-6 (DDG p. 76).

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.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 76) and the *illustration* below to establish why God spoke to the people through Haggai in a distant, rebuking way—“**these people**” instead of “My people.”


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.

Illustration: Have you ever heard someone, when upset at a child, say to his or her spouse, “Your child got in trouble today”? Notice the emphasis. The parent’s words indicate a distance from the children in an attempt to clarify his or her frustration or anger. Clearly the child has done something (or a number of somethings) to create this kind of frustration. God was employing a similar verbal technique in this passage.

PACK ITEM 10: TIMELINE OF REBUILDING: Use this timeline handout to help show how the people who returned from the exile delayed in their obedience to rebuild the temple of God.

- God’s people were returned to the promised land by the work of God through King Cyrus with the goal of rebuilding His temple (Ezra 1:2-4). They had started in earnest (see Ps. 119:60), rebuilding the altar for sacrifices and laying the foundation for the temple (Ezra 3). But then their rebuilding efforts met with opposition from the surrounding peoples, and they stopped (Ezra 4:1-5,24). It has been said that delayed obedience is disobedience. This seems to be a pretty clear picture of delayed obedience, and God was not happy about it.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

 What does delayed obedience say about a person's view of God? (that God is not important; that God's will is secondary to my own; that God doesn't understand my circumstances or what I'm doing right now; that God is unjust in His expectations)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 76) to show how God's indictment of the people explained their experience of futility and discontentment.

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.




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)

- The people of God had failed to obey God by not building His house. They argued that the time had not yet come to rebuild the temple, yet they were providing nice homes for themselves and trying to build strong farms. Their self-centered view of the world was leaving them unfulfilled.
 - God's word to them was an indictment. They were attempting to place their comfort ahead of obedience to God. They assumed that they knew better than God did about what would lead to their flourishing. But God made it plain for them that they would consider carefully their sinful ways.
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INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

 What are some ways we might be guilty of putting our own comfort ahead of obedience to God? (considering our finances from a worldly perspective instead of faithful stewardship to God, the owner of all things; refusing to share the gospel because it would take us out of our comfort zone and expose us to potential ridicule and harm; making sinful choices because they feel right and good to us instead of trusting and obeying what God has said to do or not do)

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

READ Haggai 1:12-13 (DDG p. 77).

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."

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 77) to highlight the connection between God's Word being preached and God's people listening and obeying in faith.

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.

- The Bible reminds us that we do not work for our salvation (Eph. 2:8-9), but it also reminds us that genuine salvation will always lead to works (Eph. 2:10; Jas. 2:17-18). Beyond sacrifices of contrition or offerings of goodwill, God loves our obedience (1 Sam. 15:22).
- We live in a culture where it is common to be a Christian in name only. It seems to be okay, even welcomed and affirmed, that someone can claim to follow Christ without actually following Christ. But if there is no following Christ, then there is no faith in Christ.

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 77).

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

Essential Doctrine "Inspiration of Scripture": The inspiration of Scripture refers to God's **direction** of the human authors of the Bible so that they **composed** and **recorded** His message to humankind in their original writings (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). Occasionally this inspiration was achieved through dictation, where God spoke directly to the original authors. Most of the time, however, this inspiration was achieved through the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit through the personalities of the authors so that their writings can be considered the very words of God.

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 77) to emphasize that God Himself is the greatest blessing of all, and explain how the gospel of Jesus secures our place in God’s presence for eternity.

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.

- Reminiscent of Adam and Eve’s exile from God’s presence in the garden, God promised that He would remove His presence from His people on account of their gross sin (Jer. 32:30-33). He fulfilled this promise through the Assyrians and the Babylonians. But He also promised to renew His presence with His people when they came to their senses and returned to Him (Deut. 30:1-5). To accomplish this, He promised to deal with their sin and their sinful hearts (Deut. 30:6-10; Jer. 32:36-41; Ezek. 37:20-28).
 - God made the way for His presence to dwell among His people for eternity. He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for the sin of the world in atonement, and His resurrection guarantees our freedom and eternal life in the presence of God. All who come to Jesus in faith receive the promise of His eternal presence based on the perfection of His obedience. He is with His followers always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20), when He returns and God’s dwelling is with humanity once more and forevermore (Rev. 21:3-4).
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FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 77).

Christ’s Exaltation: Christ was exalted when God **raised** Him from the dead, and Christ was exalted when He **ascended** to the Father’s right hand. He will be exalted by all creation when He **returns**. 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 **sinners**.

Essential Doctrine “Christ’s Exaltation”: Whereas the death of Christ was the ultimate example of His humiliation, the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the first and glorious example of Christ’s exaltation. Christ was exalted when God **raised** Him from the dead, and Christ was exalted when He **ascended** to the Father’s right hand. He will be exalted by all creation when He **returns**. 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 **sinners**.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



How is God’s presence with us in Christ meant to encourage us? (we are encouraged and strengthened to obey His commands by the Holy Spirit; we know that we have been forgiven of our sins by His presence with us; we have no need to fear our enemies since God is with us)

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

READ Haggai 2:6-9 (DDG p. 78).

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.’”

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 78) to highlight the reasons the Israelites could be confident that God would provide for the rebuilding of the temple: He is omnipotent and has all authority over His creation and the nations.

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.

- Just as the elders noticed at the laying of the temple’s foundation (Ezra 3:12), God Himself voiced what others were surely thinking: their new temple could not compare to the first (Hag. 2:3). But that didn’t dissuade Him from encouraging them to be strong and to work with the assurance of His powerful presence among them (Hag. 2:4-5).
- Every nation under heaven was and is under the power and authority of God. He can and will move them as He wishes to accomplish His purposes. While there are kings and kingdoms that seem powerful beyond our ability to rightly comprehend, God is bigger still. Our responsibility in those moments when we are uncertain of our circumstances is to hope in God and trust in His provision. God will work to accomplish His purposes because all the powers of the world pale in comparison to His power.

Illustration: When it seems as if the arc of history is bending toward an unfortunate end, we have to be reminded that God is in control and is able to accomplish His will. Speaking of his hope for the success of the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds of despair, and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a creative force in this universe [the almighty God], working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil, a power that is able to make a way out of no way and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.”²

EXPLAIN: Use the remaining paragraphs in the DDG (p. 78) to explain the place of peace in God’s promises and our response: **practice peace** and **pursue peace**.

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.

Commentary: The Hebrew word for “peace” in Haggai 2:9 is *shalom*. When we hear the word *peace*, we often think of the absence of conflict, but *shalom* is a much more robust word. In simple terms it could be understood as the holistic blessing of God. In other words, when God comes and works redemptively in the hearts and minds of His people, He comes bringing His *shalom*, His holistic blessing, to His children.

SAY: Our response to God’s promise of peace, which we ultimately receive in Christ (Phil. 4:6-7), should be twofold. First, we should ask ourselves, “Am I personally walking in God’s peace right now?” If not, we need to trust Christ. We need to acknowledge our brokenness and ask God to provide redemption and restoration. Second, we need to ask ourselves, “How am I working to see God’s peace made known in my community?”

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



How can God’s peace on display in the lives of believers bring glory to God? (believers bring glory to God by trusting Him as they live in His peace; believers can bless the world by pursuing God’s peace in the world in the name of Jesus, which brings God glory; believers support their evangelistic efforts as they live in God’s peace, demonstrating the validity and countercultural nature of faith in Christ)

My Mission

EXPLAIN: God created us for His glory and so we could enjoy Him forever. Even given humankind’s sinful and ultimately futile resistance to this purpose, God will not depart from it. So may we heed God’s instruction through Haggai to the people—and by extension to us—to prioritize the worship of Him above all else in life, knowing that the pursuit of God’s glory is for our own good. As God promised the people of Judah that one day He would fill His house with glory, so also do we who are in Christ look forward to a day of greater glory at Jesus’ return (1 John 3:2-3). We can press forward in obedience and mission because God is with us now and because we have confidence that He will be present with us in an even greater way in the age to come (1 Cor. 15:27-28).

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 79), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because God has forgiven our sin and dwells within us, we live in a way that shows God is our priority so others may see His glory.

- **What steps of faith will you take to live for God’s glory?**
- **How can your group work to spread the peace of God in your community?**
- **What priorities will you downplay to elevate the gospel mission of Jesus Christ in your life?**

Voices from the Church

“Believers in Christ have every reason to be encouraged. Jesus Christ will ultimately reign as King of kings and Lord of lords over all who trust in him. Our task is to persevere in the work he has called us to do.”³

–Yoilah Yilpet

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, our greatest comfort and greatest end is Your presence. We thank You for making Yourself present to us in Your Son, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. We ask that by the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives, we would glorify You by showing others Your greatness through our worship and telling them about the good news that “God is with us” because of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the **Daily Study** devotions in their DDG (pp. 80-82), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use **Encourage One Another** (p. 83) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.

Additional Commentary

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

“A common name for God in Haggai is **the LORD of Armies** (used 14 times). This title views God as the Divine Warrior in charge of the armies of heaven, thus he is all-powerful and directs the fiery forces of the armies of heaven (2 Kings 6:16-17). Because he is sovereign, he can help the discouraged people of Jerusalem rebuild the temple. The people were saying to each other **the time has not come** to finish the work of building God’s temple. Times were tough, and there was opposition, but God wanted his people to get on with the work ... **Your paneled houses** refers to the upper-income homes of Zerubbabel and Joshua. Their homes had expensive wood interior paneling to cover the ugly and uneven stones (similar to Solomon’s palace in 1 Kings 7:3,7). Why were these leaders spending lavishly on their own homes and giving no priority to building God’s house?”⁴

“Haggai repeatedly urged the people to stop and think about how they were living (1:5; 1:7; 2:15; 2:18; see also Lam. 3:40). Because of their wrong priorities, they were experiencing the calamities God had threatened in Deuteronomy 28:38-45 (see also Amos 4:6-10). Their hard work was producing only a small harvest (1:6a; see also Mic. 6:15). They never had enough to eat and drink (1:6b; compare Hos. 4:10). Their clothes did not keep them warm (1:6c). They were always short of money—their wages disappeared as though they had holes in their pockets (1:6d). We should carefully examine our own lives to make sure that we are doing God’s will. God does not accept our excuses for delaying to do his work and living in spiritual indifference or complacency. We should not give material things or our own interests priority over God and his work. When we do put him first, he will provide for all our physical, spiritual and material needs (Matt. 6:33) and will give the harvests that are so desperately needed if Africa is to avoid hunger and starvation.”⁵

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

“God used Haggai’s message to convict the people and cause them to resume the work. Zerubbabel, Joshua, and **the entire remnant** of the people **obeyed the voice of the LORD**. Haggai’s reference to the people, once they respond in obedience to God’s Word, as the ‘remnant’ is significant. These were those who feared the Lord in the sense that they chose to honor and reverence Him. As the people began their work, He encouraged them through Haggai, reassuring them that He was with them.”⁶

“In light of their favorable response to his message Haggai conveyed to the people the reassuring promise that the Lord’s presence would be with them in their endeavors. The encouragement Haggai offered the people would play a determinative role in their response. For that reason v. 13 plays an important role in the change of attitude displayed by the people. The comforting words ‘I am with you’ (*ani ’ittekem*) call to mind similar promises found elsewhere in biblical literature. Jacob received such a promise at Bethel as he began his journey to Haran (Gen. 28:15). Joseph’s amazing success in Egypt was attributed to the fact that ‘the LORD was with him’ in all he undertook (Gen. 39:2,21,23). Moses heard similar words at the burning bush (Ex. 3:12). So too did Joshua, Moses’ successor, as he assumed the mantle of leadership upon the death of Moses (Josh. 1:5), as did Gideon when he faced the Midianites (Judg. 6:16). So also did David when the Lord entered into a covenant with him (2 Sam. 7:9) and Jeremiah when he began his prophetic ministry (Jer. 1:8). When faced with the Assyrian threat, the Israelites took comfort in such words (Isa. 8:10; cf. Ps. 46:7,11). And in the New Testament messianic expectations and hopes were fulfilled in one who was called ‘Emanuel, God with us’ (Matt. 1:23).”⁷

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

“God promises to **shake all nations** (as well as ‘the heavens and the earth,’ v. 6). The result of this shaking will be that the **treasures of all nations** will be yielded by the nations to adorn the temple; but the result will also be more than this, for the Lord **will fill his house with glory**—that is, with his own presence. The focus of Haggai’s oracle in its context is specifically on the immediate fulfillment of this prophecy. In addition, from a NT vantage point, many would see a foreshadowing of events unfolding in the incarnation of Christ and ultimately in his second coming at the end of the age (e.g., when Jesus spoke of his body as ‘this temple’ in John 2:20-21; and when the book of Revelation speaks of the day when the whole city of Jerusalem will be filled with the presence of God, ‘for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb ... and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it,’ Rev. 21:22,24) ... **The latter glory of this house.** The ultimate fulfillment of this passage demands a still wider view of redemptive history. The possessions of Jew and Gentile are enlisted in restoring the temple as a place of *shalom* (**peace**, well-being). Likewise, Ezekiel envisions the temple as a source of healing (Ezek. 47:1,12; cf. Rev. 22:2). The NT ‘mystery’ is a new spiritual temple composed of people from all nations (1 Cor. 3:9,16-17), a new community that is the focal point of God’s saving work in the world (Eph. 3:8-10). Ultimately, the temple as a sign of God’s presence with his people is eclipsed by the presence of the Lord of hosts and the Lamb (Rev. 21:22-26).”⁸

References

1. Elisabeth Elliot, *On Asking God Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1989), 142.
2. Martin Luther King Jr., in “*Making a Way out of No Way*”: *Martin Luther King’s Sermonic Proverbial Rhetoric*, by Wolfgang Mieder (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 213.
3. Yoilah Yilpet, “Haggai,” in *Africa Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1102.
4. Gregory W. Parsons, “Haggai,” in *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2017), 1446, n. 1:2; n. 1:3-4.
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8. W. Brian Aucker, “Haggai,” in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 1745-46, n. 2:7; n. 2:9.