

Milk & Honey

Vol. XXXIII January 2019 No. 1

Spiritual Food and Encouragement for Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ

Getting Our Priorities Right Haggai 1

Bruce Newsham

How often do you hear someone say, "I'll do that later"? Pushing aside unimportant tasks is never a big concern, but unfortunately all too often we do that with important responsibilities. The book of Haggai addresses the issue of misplaced priorities. Although it was written to the Israelites who were neglecting the important task of rebuilding the temple, it also has profound lessons to help us with focusing on what should be our priorities today.

The Lord had raised up the Persian King Cyrus to send the Jews back to their land and about 50,000 returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua. The first priority was to rebuild the temple. They soon rebuilt the altar and laid the foundation, and the people responded with loud shouts of joy and praised the Lord (Ezra 3:11-13).

But the loud jubilation seemed to awaken their enemies and the Samaritans soon arrived on the scene. Their intimidation and threats resulted in fear and apathy and for about sixteen years no further work was done on the temple. The Lord then raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to stir up the Jews to realign their priorities and get back to work. In the first chapter of Haggai the Lord challenges His people's priorities.

Challenging procrastination and excuses

God's people were saying that the time had not yet come to build the temple (v. 2), but the Lord challenges them saying, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" (v. 4). They were making excuses and procrastinating so that they could focus on their own interests, and not on the Lord's work.

Many believers today would acknowledge that the Lord and His work should be a priority, but much more time is given to personal interests such as home renovations, playing sports, watching television, shopping and other pleasures. Without appearing legalistic, we would do well to ask ourselves, "Are we like those Jews saying, 'Yes, I am going to serve the Lord more effectively' – one day, but not yet?" Do you tend to procrastinate and find excuses as to why you cannot serve the Lord?

Getting back on track

The Lord calls His people to self-examination. He says, "Consider your ways" (v. 5). God's people were to give careful thought to the path they were travelling in their lives, and then to consider if they were heading in the right direction. The context suggests that they had drifted from where they should be and they needed to get back on track.

Many of us have spiritual ambitions and plans of what we hope to do for the Lord. We desire to serve the Lord in some way, and we begin to make plans to serve Him. But then we get busy with our work and family things (often good things), and the spiritual dream dissipates. Gradually we drift away from the course we had in mind, and sometimes even from any kind of service. Perhaps some of us have drifted away from the path we should be on – time in God's Word and prayer, involvement in our assemblies, witnessing to others, etc. Perhaps we have put in the wrong GPS coordinates and we are heading away from the Lord's things and we need to hear the resounding words, "consider your ways."

Overcoming futility

Because He loves us, the Lord has a kind way of chastising us back onto the right path. For the Jews in the days of Haggai, He withheld certain blessings (v. 6). They worked hard, but never seemed to have enough. They earned wages and put them into bags which seemed to have holes!

Some of us work long hours, but never seem to have enough. We can be so busy doing things, but don't find much joy in our activities. We can identify with the words sung by a rock band, "I can't get no satisfaction." Solomon, writing about 3,000 years ago tells us why, "For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?" (Ecclesiastes 2:25 NASB95). Solomon's lesson in this book is very clear – the things of this world cannot be enjoyed without God. Trying to do so is vanity and it is futile. In theory, we know that the things of the world do not satisfy, nor do they last, but how slow we can be to really learn this lesson! Jesus taught us to lay up our treasures in heaven. Are you investing in eternal things? (Matt. 6:19-20)

Resolving to build God's house

The Lord's desire for His people at that time was very clear. They were to "Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple..." (v. 8) The response was quite amazing. They promptly obeyed and feared the Lord (v. 12). In

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The Promise, Prospect, Period, and Provisions

Steve Hulshizer

In John 14 Christ encourages his disciples by declaring that while He was leaving them, He would return. “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come again*, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” (John 14:1-3)

The Promise—Every believer in Christ has the promise that the Lord will come again and receive him unto Himself. A reassuring aspect of this promise is the *Person* who made it. It is the Lord Himself who made this promise, “I will come again.” God manifest in the flesh has promised to come again. We can take comfort in this, for we read, “That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:” (Heb. 6:18)

It will be the Lord “Himself” who comes for us. The same One who fed the 5,000 with a few loaves and fish. The same One who raised the dead, and made the blind to see. The same One who walked on water, and calmed the raging sea. The same One who walked with the two on the road to Emmaus. The same One man rejected and crucified. “This same Jesus” will come to take us home to be with Himself.

The *purpose* of this promise is stated by the Lord Himself, “that where I am there ye also may be.” He is coming again to take us out of this world to where He is. The bride will be with the Bridegroom. For all eternity we will be where He is.

The Prospect—This promise gives each believer a *prospect*—the certainty of being with the Lord. We can look forward to be taken from this world, whether we are alive and remain at His coming, or whether we have already gone to glory through the door of death, only to be reunited with our resurrected and changed bodies.

This hope is heavenly. (Col. 1:5) It is a living hope, in that it is in the living One who sits at God’s right hand. (1 Pet. 1:3) This hope is “an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast....” (Heb. 6:19)

One aspect of this prospect is its *intimacy*. It is the Bridegroom coming for His bride. The bride is to be looking for a Person, not an event. Paul said, “We look for the Savior.” (Phil. 3:20) The Thessalonian saints had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven.” (1 Thess. 1:10) We should be waiting for

the Lord as a bride waits for her bridegroom. Not just to be taken from the scene, but to be where He is.

Another aspect of the prospect of His coming is *imminency*.” The Lord can come at any moment. This should keep us from driving our tent pegs deeper and deeper into this world.

The Period—Between the Lord’s promise to come again, and the realization of the prospect set before us is a *period* of time. It is an *indefinite* period of time. There are no “seventy weeks” for the New Testament church. How long this period is no one knows, except God.

The fact that this period is indefinite requires us to *wait patiently*. As in Noah’s day there are some who would question whether the Lord will keep His Word. In similar fashion Israel grew tired of waiting for Moses to return from the mountain and made themselves “other gods.” Idolatry is an ever present danger as we wait “for His Son from heaven” in this indefinite period.

The period is not only indefinite, but one of *increasing darkness, departure, and deception*. This means we must be *watchful*. We must “wait,” and we must “watch.” There is to be an *expectation*. We must not fall asleep as did the ten virgins. The Bright and Morning Star precedes the rising of the sun and will arise in the darkest hour of the day. We must remember the longer the night, the closer the rising of the Sun.

This period will also be marked by *impurity*. We must then *walk* as children of the light. We must flee fornication, and walk as *examples* to the dark world around us.

Indifference will mark this indefinite period of time. This requires the believers to be *working*. So many are entangled in the affairs of life, and are indifferent with regard to the things of the Lord. Worldly events take priority over the gatherings of the local assembly, and personal time in prayer and the reading of God’s Word.

The Provisions—The Lord has not left us without provisions for this indefinite period of time. The following are some of those things which we have to encourage and enable us to patiently wait, watch, walk, and work until He comes again.

We have an incorruptible and undefiled *inheritance* reserved for us in heaven. (1 Pet. 1:4) We have the certainty of being forever with the Lord. This fact should keep our eyes forward and encourage our hearts. (Heb. 12:2)

We have an *interceding High Priest* who “ever liveth to make intercession for us.” (Heb. 7:25) One Who has been here and suffered for righteousness sake.

The Lord has given us the *indwelling Holy Spirit* to comfort us along the way. One who will come alongside to strengthen us during this time.

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Then there is the *inspired Word of God*. That which never changes is able to guide us through this ever changing world.

We also have the *incense of the Lord's Supper*; that constant remembrance of the One who purchased us at great expense and Who will return to take His bride to be with Himself.

Having this personal promise of the Lord Himself to return for us, let us continue to wait, watch, walk, and work in this indefinite Period between the Promise and the Prospect, making use of all the Provisions He has provided. *

They Heard John and Followed Jesus

Steve Hulshizer

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. John 1:6-8

John the Baptist came to bare witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. This he did faithfully as he directed those in his hearing away from himself to the Lamb of God. (John 3:30)

One day John stood with two of his disciples. "Looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!" Then the apostle John writes, "And the two disciples *heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.*" (John 1:36-37) What a wonderful testimony to the ministry of John the Baptist!

We live in a day when many follow the preachers (1 Cor. 1:12), and may even idolize them to the point where their word is considered infallible. Sadly, some preachers, unlike the apostle Paul, desire such followings and minister accordingly. (1 Thess. 2:4-6)

While we should value those who faithfully minister God's Word, let us be on guard that we do not become followers of men, but of the glorified Christ. *

Three Facts of Life

First, we all know we have not always been here. Each of us had a beginning to life, a birthday. So we are finite.

Second, we will not always be here. Our days are numbered of the Lord. Men may live like their days are endless; however, the truth is there is an end.

Third, we are here now. We do not know how long we will be here, but for the moment we are here. This gives us the opportunity to prepare for what follows death. The Bible tells us, ... "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." (Heb. 9:27) So unless one trusts Christ as personal Savior judgment is sure to follow death. Why not use this moment God has given us to trust in Christ? *

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act of a living faith, as we read in James two. We see also in 1 Peter 1:2 that the initial sanctifying operation of the Holy Spirit brings a person "to obedience," with resulting cleansing (from sin) through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Compare Romans 6:17-18, "You obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to you. Being then freed from sin you became enslaved to righteousness."

1) As the result of that initial act of faith-obedience to the Lord the now saved believer has been made to be one of God's "obedient children," and should therefore now "be holy as He Who has called you is holy" (1 Peter 1:14-16).

2) In our Lord's last discourse to His disciples, in John 14 and 15, we find repeatedly His expectation that, as their acknowledged Lord, they will obey His commands. In 14:15 we read, "If you love me, (you will) keep my commandments." In 14:21, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." See also 14:23, and note verse 24, "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings." A living faith will obey God in all His commands, without hesitation, as did faithful Abraham, according to James 2:21-24.

3) Obedience to God's Word is thus one of the evidences of the presence of His life. And where that evidence is lacking, it throws one's profession of salvation into serious question, as John points out in his first epistle (1 John 2:4).

May we all firmly reject this folly of equating obedience to what God's Word commands as "legalism"! His salvation sets us free to do His will, not to disregard it. Refusal of obedience to Him would evidence that we do not really love the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 16:22 Paul writes, "If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema!" While it is true that we are not "under law," in the sense that we are not under obligation to keep the law in order to be saved, it is also true that God's purpose in saving us is that the righteousness He has outlined in the law might be fulfilled in us who, as He expects, "Are (no longer) walking according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:4). A professing believer's refusal to obey any aspect of God's Word is entirely without excuse! *

Excerpt from "Some Evangelical Misapprehensions"

Free Gospel Tract

It's Not Funny When God Laughs

Proverbs 1:24-31 speaks of man's foolishness in leaving God out of his thinking. God responds, *I also will laugh at your calamity...* Man's rejecting of God's Word leads to his destruction - this is true spiritually as well. This tract shows God's wisdom in providing eternal life through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. (Write for free copies.)

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A non-profit ministry of
Spread The Word, Inc., 3237 Faire Wynd Pl
Dover, PA 17315

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 333
York, PA

FoodForSaints.com

January 2019

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just three weeks they had gathered the resources and were ready to build!

Believers today are not called to build a literal temple; nevertheless we have work to do. We are all to be involved in the work of the Lord; taking the Gospel of Christ to the lost, caring for His people, strengthening those in the Body of Christ, serving in a variety of practical ways in the local gathering, financial support, etc. This work will be different for each of us as we have differing gifts, but the command to be working or serving is given to all. Haggai tells us that the Lord stirred the hearts back then to rebuild the temple (v. 14). Is He stirring your heart today to be serving Him and involved in His work?

Being aware of His presence

After obeying the Lord, God's people were given the wonderful assurance of His presence, "I am with you, says the Lord" (v. 14). The people responded to God's Word. They got to work and the blessings returned (2:19). But the greatest blessing was the sense of the Lord's presence, as the Psalmist experienced, "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11 NKJV).

As we choose to obey the Lord, and go and make disciples as He commanded us, or serve Him in a myriad of other ways, we can have this greater awareness of His presence. This He has promised, "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen." (Matthew 28:20 NKJV). *

Distributing Funds to Workers

While Spread The Word distributes funds to commended home workers, as of 1/1/19 it will not be sending funds to workers living outside of the United States.

Obedience and Legalism

A. E. Horton

It is surprising how many real believers in Christ confuse these two things! When some one is told what the Word of God commands, and it is pointed out to him that he should be obeying the Word, the response may be, "Oh, that is legalism!" Or when a believer practices what he believes the Word of God teaches, others, who for some reason do not see eye to eye with him, may accuse him of "legalism"! That is a most unspiritual thing to say in such a case! Let's note here:

That the Christian life has its inception in a faith-act of obedience to the Word of God. In Romans 1:5 Paul writes—that he has received grace and apostleship for "obedience to the faith" (literally, "unto obedience of faith," that is, as some render it, "obedience which springs from faith") "among all nations." Compare Romans 15:26, where we find the same construction. In the gospel God calls all, as we have seen, to bow the knee to the living Lord Jesus Christ. Everything begins for any person with that first act of faith-obedience to Him. Let's remember here what we have noted before: that such faith-obedience is not a "work" done to merit salvation, and to say that it is a grave error. It is the

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Milk & Honey Information

There is no charge for Milk & Honey. It, like all ministries of Spread The Word, is supported entirely by the freewill offerings of the Lord's people. All gifts are tax deductible.

Publisher: **Spread The Word, Inc.**

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