

## Getting Started Again

Haggai 1:1-4

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I jumped online recently in search of some procrastination humor. One site promised the “*best procrastination joke ever.*” When I clicked on the link, only two words appeared: “*Coming soon.*” Now that’s funny.

Here’s a helpful definition: “*Procrastination is the bad habit of putting off until the day after tomorrow what should have been done the day before yesterday.*”

I’m generally not prone to procrastinating but there is something I do put off every year – filling out FAFSA forms for financial aid for college. This is my 10<sup>th</sup> year to do this and I’d rather have a root canal then file these forms.

Before learning from some premier procrastinators in the Bible, let’s celebrate what God did at Edgewood Easter weekend.

- We had 45 babies in the nursery and 50 three and four-year-olds
- Nearly 1600 people gathered to recognize the reality of the resurrection
- Around 30 people indicated they received Jesus Christ!

We’re beginning a new series called, “Now is the Time” from the Book of Haggai. I’ve heard his name pronounced two ways – *Haig-e-eye* and *Haig-eye*. I believe the proper way is *Haig-eye*, but he’s no longer around so it probably doesn’t matter. Some people think since I graduated from Bible College and Seminary that I know how to pronounce all these names. I’ll let you in on a secret. When I’m not sure I just say the name very quickly and with a lot of confidence so people think I have it figured out!

Since Haggai is the second-shortest book in the Old Testament (after Obadiah), it’s a bit difficult to locate. It’s found between Zephaniah and Zechariah, which probably doesn’t help all that much. The easiest way to get there is to find Matthew and then hang a left three books. If you’re using a mobile device it’s much easier to find.

## His-Story

In order to properly interpret and apply this brief book of just two chapters, we must understand its historical context. If you lock in, I'll try my best to unlock some of the details in a way that is understandable and even interesting.

We begin with a man named **Abraham**. He came from a pagan country and was promised a place and a people by God. He and his wife gave birth to a son named **Isaac**. Isaac became the father of **Jacob** and he had 12 sons, who became known as the **12 Tribes of Israel**. They ended up in bondage in Egypt for 400 years. **Moses** led them out and then God gave His people instructions for how to worship Him in a portable worship center, called the **Tabernacle**.

After entering (Wisconsin) the land of promise, they were given three kings, each of whom ruled 40 years. Their names were **Saul, David** and **Solomon**. David wanted to build a permanent worship structure but that honor was given to his son Solomon, who constructed a magnificent **Temple**. It was the centerpiece of the nation and the focal point of their worship.

But things went downhill from there. After Solomon died, Israel was split into two kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom had ten tribes and was referred to as **Israel**. The Southern Kingdom had two tribes and was referred to as **Judah**.

Due to disobedience, the **Assyrians** attacked Israel and the northern tribes were scattered and became known as the "ten lost tribes of Israel." Even though the southern tribes saw all this happen, they, too, continued to rebel against God. Many years later the **Babylonians** destroyed Jerusalem, decimated the Temple, and deported the Jews to what is now modern-day Iraq. This period of time is called the **exile**.

It was always God's plan to restore His people to the land. We learned about this in our CONTEXT series last fall as we unpacked Jeremiah 29:10-11: ***"For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."***

Years later God allowed the Persians to conquer the Babylonians and he moved King **Cyrus** to make a decree to let some of the Jews return. And in three stages, they were allowed to jet back to Jerusalem.

In that first group, 50,000 Israelites returned to Judah with **Zerubbabel** and rebuilt the altar and began offering sacrifices. There was a lot of excitement among the people and they worked hard. Two years later they finished the foundation of the Temple. Unfortunately, they got discouraged and fell into some serious procrastination. God then sent the prophets **Haggai** and **Zechariah** to encourage them to finish the project. **Ezra** was also utilized to help restore their spiritual fervor and **Nehemiah** rallied them to rebuild the walls.

With the people off mission, they procrastinate for 16 years until Haggai the prophet starts preaching. The message is clear: *God's purposes must have priority over our pursuits.* We're going to need to buckle up for this series because while Haggai is brief, he's also very blunt. What he records is pointed and profound.

Let's look at verse 1: ***"In the second year of Darius the king [This is a reminder that God's people had no king of their own and that they were living in "the times of the Gentiles"], 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."***

This verse establishes the *when, what* and *who*.

- **When.** This is one of the most precisely dated books in the entire Bible. We not only know the year (second), we are certain of the month (sixth) and the day (first)! This is yet another reminder that the Bible is not a hoax but is set in history and is filled with verifiable facts not fables.
- **What.** Notice that Haggai is not giving some *"Helpful habits to have a happy life"* but rather he is simply the human instrument through which the Lord is communicating His message. This gives us insight into the doctrine of inspiration. The Bible is the ***"word of the Lord"*** delivered by the ***"hand of Haggai the prophet."*** This is more fully fleshed out in 2 Peter 1:21: ***"For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."***
- **Who.** While this prophecy is for all the people and for us, it is directed first to two guys running point on the project. **Zerubbabel** (that's fun to pronounce) served as the *civil* leader and was the grandson of King Jehoiachin, the last king of Judah. His name shows up in the family tree of Jesus in Matthew 1:13. **Joshua** (not the one who succeeded Moses) served

as the *spiritual* leader. He was “*the son of Jehozadak* (I say that name quickly), *the high priest.*”

It’s essential for leaders to be growing in the Lord and receptive to His leading. I love serving on a staff team of servants and alongside a group of devoted deacons and trusted trustees. Let me share an example of how earnest our leaders are. After six months of planning by our Facility Team, the deacons gathered with the project manager and architect from The Aspen Group to approve the final conceptual plans and the budget that we’ll be presenting to the congregation at a special meeting on **Sunday, April 22 at 5:00 pm** in anticipation of a vote by our members on **Sunday, April 29 at 5:00 pm**.

As we were contemplating the scope of this project, it became quickly apparent that the Lord was calling us to spend some protracted time in prayer so we took the next 5 days to seek the Lord. When we gathered again, it was clear that God was moving us forward. As we went around the table, I wrote down what each of them said. The first three guys made these statements, “*The time is now...it’s time to do this...we were unsure two years ago but God has now given us direction.*”

I want to be clear. We will not be presenting an expansion and renovation project because we just want a bigger and better building. It’s so we can give glory to God by maximizing our space for greatest possible ministry impact. Just this week Cindy Boultinghouse, a long-time Edgewood member sent me a question by text. BTW, I asked permission to share this. Here was her question, “*I have been asked several times why our church is growing while others seem to be dwindling. I want to give the right answer and yet be sensitive at the same time. What would be a good answer to this question?*”

I first celebrated how she lives on mission and then wrote, “*You might say something like, ‘God has been blessing His Word as it is preached and taught. Many people’s lives are changing and that becomes contagious. Those who experience life change can’t help but tell others about it. All the glory goes to Him. We’re just trying to be faithful in gathering, growing, giving and going.’*” As Psalm 115:1 says, “*Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory!*”

Do you need a spiritual reboot? Has your devotion to Christ started to drift? If so, lean in and listen because *God’s purposes must have priority over our pursuits.*

**1. Put God in His proper place.** The first step is to acknowledge how awesome God is. Here’s one of my favorite A.W. Tozer quotes: “*What comes into our*

*minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” We see this in the first part of verse 2: **“Thus says the Lord of Hosts...”***

The name for Lord is “*Jehovah*” or “*Yahweh*” and occurs 34 times in the book. Jehovah is the self-existent God who is personal, present, powerful, and the ultimate promise-keeper. **“*Lord of Hosts*”** is a translation from *Jehovah Sabaoth*, which references the Covenant Keeper as the commander of all the armies of heaven. It’s used over 270 times in the Bible and 14 times alone in this brief book! It’s fascinating that this name for God appears about 90 times in the three last books of the Old Testament! The word *Sabaoth* can refer to an immense army or innumerable angelic beings.

If you’re using the Edgewood Bible Reading Plan you would have read Psalm 33:8 on Thursday: **“*Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.*”** Have you put God in His proper place? Do you approach Him with reverence and awe? God tells us what kind of people He is looking for in Isaiah 66:2: **“*But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.*”**

I was talking to a young dad at our Men’s Gathering on Thursday about what God is teaching him. With tears in his eyes, he told me that while he reads the Bible to his kids, has them in church and in AWANA, he’s not done a good job helping them grow in their fear (reverence) of God. He’s already working on changing that.

*God’s purposes must have priority over our pursuits.* The first step is to *put God in His proper place.* The second step is to *proceed without procrastination.*

**2. Proceed without procrastination.** Even though the people faced some mounting problems, the God of the angel armies speaks urgently and authoritatively as He summarizes their lame excuse in verse 2: **“*These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.*”** By referring to them as **“*these*”** people and not **“*my people,*”** God was indicating that they were not acting like *his* people because they had been spiritually adrift for 16 years! That reminds me of Hosea 1:9: **“*Call his name ‘Not My People,’ for you are not my people, and I am not your God.*”**

If you’re a Christian, are you living like a Christian? If you’re saved, are you serving? Can people tell that you’re a follower of Christ before you tell them you’re following Christ?

Would you notice that none of them were claiming it wasn't important to build God's house. They just didn't think the time was right.

If you had asked them why they had stopped working on God's house they may have said something like this: *"Don't misunderstand me. I'm all for rebuilding it but the time isn't somehow right. It's expensive and we're in an economic downturn and there's a lot of political uncertainty right now. The project is too big and there is too much opposition. I have other things to take care of first, like my farm and my house [and my kids have sports and activities and other events]. I'll get around to making God a priority...I promise. Just not now."*

Their excuses sound familiar, don't they? They even sound reasonable and realistic. Excuses *always* sound that way.

- I have too much going on to make it to church every weekend. After all, Saturday is my day and Sunday's my only day to sleep in!
- People at church are hypocrites and I don't like some of them. To which I often say, *"Why don't you join us and we'll have one more!"*
- I'll think about joining a Growth Group when my schedule settles down a bit.
- I'll give more when I have more to give.
- I'll surrender myself totally to the Lord after I finish school, or when I get some rest, or when I retire.

Someone said it like this: *"If and when were planted and nothing grew."*  
Ecclesiastes 11:4: ***"He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap."***

John Henry Newman once remarked: *"No one sins without making some excuse to himself for sinning."* Benjamin Franklin wrote, *"I never knew a man who was good at making excuses who was good at anything else."*

If you need a spiritual reboot, first make sure you've *put God in His proper place* and second, *proceed without procrastination*. Finally, *prioritize God over your pleasures*.

**3. Prioritize God over your pleasures.** After all is said and done, more is said than done.

Look at verses 3-4: ***“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?’”*** The people were saying that they wanted to use their time, talents and treasures on themselves. Here’s how it literally reads, ***“Is it a time for you [yes] yourselves...”*** The word ***“you”*** refers to each of them individually and ***“yourselves”*** refers to the whole community.

When you read ***“paneled”*** houses, don’t think of a cheap way to put a room down in the basement. The principal building material back then was stone but these people were using paneling that looked more like wainscoting, made out of cedar or expensive oak. It was typically only used in a palace like Solomon’s as seen in 1 Kings 7:7: ***“And he made the Hall of the Throne where he was to pronounce judgment, even the Hall of Judgment. It was finished with cedar from floor to rafters.”***

We know from Ezra 3:7 that King Cyrus had provided money to buy hardwood to rebuild the temple; it’s likely that they used these expensive materials instead for their own homes. In contrast to what they were building for themselves, the word ***“ruins”*** means that God’s house was ***“desolate and decaying; parched.”***

How can they say the time is not right after God had moved a pagan king to send them back to Jerusalem to do the job? Simply put, they didn’t care about God or His kingdom. They were much more into their own pleasure.

Do you catch the contrast between God’s desolate house and their decorated houses? They are not just spending time building their homes; they are now living luxuriously in them.

Their attitude was the exact opposite of what King David said years earlier when he realized that he was living in a nice house but there was nothing built for God’s house. 2 Samuel 7:2: ***“See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.”*** David was proactive, not a procrastinator according to Psalms 132:3-5: ***“I will not enter my house or get into my bed, I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.”***

They stopped doing the chief work that they had been commissioned to do! Likewise, our main job today is to bring glory to God by living out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission as we gather, grow, give and go with the gospel! That’s why we’re here! We can all experience mission drift if we

don't stay on task.

These procrastinating people had become apathetic, indifferent, negligent and indulgent. Like them, our default setting is selfishness. If we give no thought to how we're living we'll automatically live for our own agendas. Thomas Watson put it like this: *"Unless we deny our own will, we shall never do God's will."*

The bottom line is that the people thought they could do life without God at the center. We'll discover how this was working out for them in two weeks. In a similar way, it's very easy for us to live our lives without God in His rightful place. They thought God was nice; they just didn't see Him as a necessity. He was something extra, not essential. They had settled in the land and settled spiritually as well.

Are you living without the Lord at the center of your life? Check out what Pastor Steven Cole writes and see if this describes you.

*We need to see ourselves in this picture. If you know Christ, there was a time you made a personal commitment to Him...at first; you were zealous for spiritual things. You read your Bible every day...and got involved serving...but perhaps your efforts met with difficulties. You had a personality clash with another Christian, or you were disillusioned...or you encountered personal trials that God didn't remove.*

*Meanwhile, life moved on. You started a career and a family. You had bills to pay and other demands on your time. Church and the Lord's work drifted into the background. You tell yourself that you just don't have time to serve as you used to...without deliberately rebelling against God, you have drifted into putting your house above God's house.*

If you're spiritually stuck or drifting due to disobedience, settle this truth right now: *God's purposes must have priority over our pursuits.* We can live that out by...

- **Putting God in His proper place**
- **Proceeding without procrastination**
- **Prioritizing God over your pleasures**

**Communion**

Because communion is so important, we don't ever want to become complacent when we celebrate what Jesus has done for us. That's why we change up what we do when the trays are passed. Sometimes we sit in silence. Other times we play instrumental music. On occasion we sing about the cross. One time I had each of us think about a lost person and pray for them during this time. Today we'll listen to 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 and then move into a time of quiet reflection. We'll then watch a very moving video that will remind us of the finished work of Jesus Christ while the elements are distributed.

Please close your eyes: *“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”*

1 Corinthians 11:28 calls us to a time of honest assessment: *“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”* Another guy at the men's gathering this week shared how he's been praying. You might want to pray something similar: *“Lord, take away anything that stands in the way of you, even if it's things I like.”* Let's examine ourselves silently...and refuse to make any excuses because *God's purposes must have priority over our pursuits.*

**Time of Silence**

**Distribution of Elements**

**Video**

**New Members – 8**

**Tommy Anderson Baptism – 10:45**