

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

HAGGAI 1-2

Once upon a time, there were four church members named **Everybody**, **Somebody**, **Anybody**, and **Nobody**. All were members of the church **BODY**...

Once, the church had financial needs and Everybody was asked to help. Everybody was sure Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it. *But you know who did it? Nobody.* Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

Then the church grounds needed some work, and Somebody was asked to help. But Somebody got angry because Anybody could have done it just as well, and it was really Everybody's job. In the end the work was given to Nobody, and *Nobody* did a fine job.

On and on this went. Whenever work was to be done, Nobody could always be counted on.

Nobody visited the sick. Nobody gave liberally. Nobody shared his faith. In short, Nobody was a very faithful member. Finally the day came when Somebody left the church and took Anybody and Everybody with him. *And guess who was left? That's right, Nobody!"*

Haggai was the pastor of a church full of Nobodies.

Nobody had time to serve the Lord. Nobody had strength to serve the Lord. Nobody had resources to serve the Lord. Nobody was willing to serve the Lord.

The Prophet Haggai was a Somebody sent to encourage and mobilize a group of Nobodies...

The Jews had done their time in Babylon. They had served their seventy year sentence in captivity.

Now 50,000 Jews pull up stakes and follow Governor Zerubbabel, and High Priest Joshua, back to the land of their fathers. They have *high hopes* for a *new start*.

But when they arrive, Jerusalem - and in particular the Temple Mount - wasn't as they remembered.

The Babylonians had not only defeated the Jews, they had demolished the city, and toppled the Temple.

For two centuries the Temple had been the center of Israel's national life. Now it was a patch of weeds and rock. The once glorious *Temple* was reduced to *rubble*.

The people though were dogged and determined.

These Babylonian Jews had left good jobs and quiet neighborhoods in response to the tremendous challenge of returning and rebuilding the house of God.

They had sacrificially enrolled in a noble endeavor.

When they arrive their first move is to collect an offering. We read about it in Ezra 2:68-69, "According to their ability, they gave to the treasury for the work 61,000 gold drachmas, 5000 minas of silver, and 100 priestly garments." Or the equivalent of \$60,000 - not a bad start for a building fund - especially in 536 BC.

In the seventh month of that first year they used the funds to build an altar, offered sacrifice, and celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Over the next seven months they hire masons and carpenters, and had cedar logs shipped from Lebanon to the port of Joppa. They laid the Temple's foundation in the 2nd month of 535 BC.

But that's as far as they got! The work came to a screeching halt. They abandoned the project because they ran into opposition. The Samaritans, a race of apostate, half-breed Jews, had moved into the region during the Jews seventy year hiatus. The Samaritans didn't like the Jews returning to rebuild the Temple and re-settle Jerusalem. They began a campaign to hinder the work. Their efforts included: *infiltration, agitation, intimidation*, even *litigation*. They finally obtained an injunction from Persia temporarily blocking the work.

By this point, the Jews who returned were tired of fighting city hall, and grew more interested in their own projects. They went to work building their own homes and establishing their businesses. For the next fifteen years the work of rebuilding the Temple was neglected.

I suppose they were guilty *of throwing in the trowel*.

This grieved the heart of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, and the Lord used them to light a fire under the people and recommence the Temple construction.

Haggai preached four sermons over four months in the fall of 520 BC. His book is the transcripts of his four sermons with a few editorial comments inserted.

Haggai's first sermon, **1:1-11**, was delivered on August 29... His second sermon, **2:1-9**, was preached 49 days later, on October 17... His third sermon, **2:10-19**, came on December 18... And the Prophet's last sermon, **2:20-23**, was spoken on that same day.

Each of Haggai's four sermons addresses a different problem hindering the work of building the Temple.

And these are the same four problems that hinder you and I - that interfere with our church - that keep us from accomplishing the work God has given us to do.

In Sermon 1 Haggai deals with the people's **self-centeredness**. Sermon 2 addresses their **short-sightedness**. Sermon 3 their **self-righteousness**. And Sermon 4 deals with their tendency to **second-guess**.

Haggai begins, **"In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month..."** The date was August 29, 520 BC. More importantly, notice the change in the biblical author's dating method...

Prior to their captivity the Prophets reckoned time according to the Hebrew kings, but now Judah is no longer a kingdom. It's a province of Persia and the Prophet Haggai ties his dates to the Persian rulers.

At that time, **"the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, "Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, saying: 'This people says..."** Notice the Lord doesn't address the Jews as **"My**

people,” but rather, “*This people...*” He’s obviously angry with them.

For they were making excuses, “*The time has not come, the time that the Lord’s house should be built.*””

In the beginning, they were so eager to rebuild the Temple, but *opposition had discouraged them, and preoccupation with their own homes had distracted them.* The Jews were now guilty of procrastinating the very purpose that had inspired them to return.

And sadly, church members today can also be guilty of procrastinating God’s purposes... Someone says, “*I’ll have time to serve God once my business gets established.*” Or “*After I retire I’ll be more available.*” Or “*When I get married things will be different.*” Or “*Once the kids get older then I’ll get more involved at church.*” Often, our *motivation* gives way to our *procrastination*.

The story is told of an infidel who willed his farm to the devil. When he died the Probate Court wondered how to fulfill the man's order. After an extended deliberation the court issued the following ruling, “*The best way to carry out the wish of the deceased is to allow the farm to grow weeds, the soil to erode, the house and barn to rot. In the court's opinion, the best way to leave something to the devil is to do nothing.*”

The Jews who returned from Babel planned to serve the Lord, but in doing nothing actually served the devil.

Verse 3, “*Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?”* The Jews

had said, *“The time has not come that the Lord’s house should be built...”*, but they sure had time to build their own houses. In fact, what they built were no ordinary houses. They were custom-built homes - not just *houses*, but *“paneled houses!”*

I wonder if the paneling was cedar? The book of Ezra tells us that before they laid the foundation of the Temple they shipped in cedar logs from Lebanon to furnish the Temple. That was fifteen years previous. *It makes you wonder what happened to the cedar siding!*

If they didn’t rip God off directly, they did so indirectly through their procrastination. They returned to Jerusalem with high hopes, but when they discovered that serving the Lord wasn't a cake walk, they retreated into the narrow world of *self-centeredness*. This is the theme of Haggai’s first sermon, **self-centeredness**.

I've seen this happen too often. Christians with good intentions suddenly realize ministry isn’t as easy as they thought. Being God’s servant isn’t as glamorous as they assumed. When you’re a servant people often treat you like one. At times you get hurt and feel used.

Ministry isn’t the source of personal fulfillment you figured it might be. *Serving feels more like well serving.*

When this happens some people bail on the church. They withdraw into a world of self-absorption and self-protection. Ask them to pitch in and you get excuses.

When Christians serve and get hurt, they sometimes conclude that serving the Lord just isn’t worth the risk.

They'd rather work in their own yard, than at church.
Invest in their own retirement, than in the church.
Play and sing in their own band, than at the church.
Build their own house, than build the church.

Did you hear about the couple who sent the following email to their pastor, "Dear Pastor, We know you stress regular church attendance, but we think every member should be excused for the following reasons and for the number of times indicated... Christmas (Sunday before or after) 1 - New Year's Day (party lasted too long) 1 - Easter (spring break for the kids) 1 - July 4th (national holiday) 1 - Labor Day (getaway) 1 - Memorial Day (visit hometown) 1 - School closing (Kids need a break) 1 - School opens (last fling) 1 - Family reunions (mine and the wife's) 2 - Sleep late (late Saturday night activities) 4 - Deaths in the family 2 - Sickness (one for each family member) 5 - Anniversary 1 - Business trips (got a make a living) 4 - Vacation 3 - Bad weather (ice, snow, rain, fog) 5 - Little league games 6 - Unexpected company (can't walk out) 3 - Time changes (Spring ahead, Fall back) 2 - TV Specials (Super Bowl, etc.) 5.

Pastor, that leaves us two Sundays per year. So you can count on us to be in church on the fourth Sunday in February and the third Sunday in August unless providentially hindered. Sincerely, Faithful Member."

Excuses, excuses, excuses... at some point they need to stop - lest you forever ignore what's important.

Here's what I've noticed in my 36 years as a pastor, people like coming, and even serving as long as they can walk away

from it if it gets too hard. But what the church really needs is people who'll take responsibility.

Like the church choir that was preparing for the Christmas cantata. The director was frustrated with his choir members' inconsistent attendance at practices.

The night before the big production he bragged on his pianist, "I'd like to personally thank Marjorie for being the only person in this entire choir who over the last two months has not missed a single rehearsal."

That's when Majorie replied, *"It's the least I can do, since I'm going to have to miss tomorrow night."*

To build a Temple or church, you need people who can be counted on - who'll be here when its convenient *and* inconvenient. Who'll take on some responsibility.

You need Christians who'll be *as serious about their tithe as they are their mortgage payment... as serious about getting their kids to Sunday School as getting them to the Little League game... as serious about studying their Bible as they are at hitting the gym...*

You need people who care enough about the Temple of God to put it ahead of their own personal interests.

Verse 5, **"Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways!"** And may we do the same!

"You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes." Thus says the Lord of hosts: **"Consider your ways!"** Haggai is addressing

the self-centeredness of his countrymen. They've been preoccupied with their own interests, *but where has it got them?* They're not truly satisfied. They're far from content. They've served only themselves and they have nothing to show for it.

What a vivid picture Haggai paints... *“he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes.”* He makes a lot, but has nothing to show for his labor.

Selfishness is like going shopping with a bottomless shopping bag. You stuff it with merchandise, spend all your money, but in the end all you got is an empty bag.

God's command is simple, *“Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified,” says the Lord.* The idea is to stop talking about what you're going to do for God, *and do it.* Talk is cheap. Obedience brings God glory.

And God wants them to obey Him now! This is why he says *“go up to the mountains and bring wood.”*

He doesn't say, order more cedar from Lebanon. Rather, He says use what you've got. Start where you're at. Go to the Judean hills and bring local wood.

If you wait for the finest cedar you'll wait forever. Don't worry about issues that are no concern to God.

“You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?” says the Lord of hosts. “Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house.” Wow, you lived for yourselves.

You brought stuff home, but God blew it away. He made sure you couldn't enjoy the spoils you worked so hard to obtain.

God wasn't going to let His people enjoy their homes when they were willing to let His house lie in ruins.

“Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands.” Because the Jews neglected God's Temple, the Lord cut off their abundance. God sent lean times to call attention to the inequity in the camp.

Verse 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 presence of the Lord.

Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, spoke the Lord's message to the people, saying, “I am with you, says the Lord.” So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius.”

God's people **heard** the Lord - they **feared** the Lord - they **obeyed** the Lord - and they **praised** the Lord!

As we often say, "What the Lord asks us to do, He equips us to do." Or "The Lord's callings are His enablings." Or "Where God guides He provides."

These are all different ways of stating the same truth.

Notice, as soon as Zerubbabel and company determine to obey, the Lord says, "*I am with you.*"

God will work alongside them. This is a shoulder to shoulder venture. **The people worked for God and God worked in the people.** Once they obeyed, the Lord sent His Spirit to stir them up. This teaches us an important lesson, **God gets to work, once we get to work.**

Chapter 2, "**In the seventh month, on the twenty-first of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying...**" The date was October 17, 520 BC.

They renewed the construction on September 21. So by the time of his second sermon they'd been working on the Temple for a little more than three weeks.

But again, not much had gotten done. During those three weeks there'd been three Jewish feasts - Rosh Hashanah or Feast of Trumpets - Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement - and Sukkoth or Feast of Tabernacles.

These feasts were not an option. The Law called for a mandatory observance. The feasts were one of the few legitimate excuses for putting off the work. At least half, thirteen of the twenty-six days, were holy days. Little tangible progress had been made on the Temple.

Verse 2, "**Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the**

high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying: 'Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now?

In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing?" Ezra 3:12 tells us that fifteen years earlier, when the foundation of the Temple was laid, "Many of the... old men, who had seen the first Temple, wept with a loud voice..." They threw a wet blanket over the worker's enthusiasm. These men remembered the glory and beauty of Solomon's Temple. In comparison the Temple being built by Zerubbabel looked like a hut.

I'm sure some of the workers wondered, "*Why bother? If our resources are so limited, and our efforts so meager we might as well shut down construction.*"

This is how I've often felt when I'd go to the pastors conferences in Southern California. I'd look at the larger churches with bigger numbers, and get so discouraged. What God was doing in our church was so meager, so *hut-like* in comparison. My sour attitude would throw a wet blanket over my own enthusiasm.

Yet this kind of comparison wasn't fair to Zerubbabel. Solomon started with far more wealth and resources.

Zerubbabel had \$60,000. At today's prices the gold and silver in Solomon's Temple was in excess of \$10 million. Yet Zerubbabel was faithful to obey God in all He was called to do, even if that *all* was *not much*.

Haggai said that in building this Temple, Zerubbabel and company, were bringing pleasure and glory to God. *Now,*

who's calling that “*nothing*”? What the old geezers called *irrelevant*, God called *significant*!

Whitey Herzog is a Hall Of Fame baseball manager who led both the Cardinals and Royals to World Series victories. In his heyday, he was called the greatest manager of all time - a claim he'd always dispute.

Herzog said the only way to decide the best manager would be to give several managers the exact same players and compares results at the end of the year - which of course, would be an impossible task.

But the same is true of pastors. To decide the most successful you'd have to place every pastor in the same community, with the same congregation, the same facilities, the same resources, etc., etc. - then come back in five years and compare the health of the different churches. *Comparison is a tricky business.*

Folks in ministry need to learn to do what God calls them to do - where He calls them to do it - with what He's given them to use. We need to stop listening to the old timers, and *the call to compare*. God's plan for each of us is unique. *This kind of comparison is a sin.*

Ministry is a lot like marriage. Start comparing your spouse with others, and you'll always be able to find someone with more money or who's better looking. Married folks have to believe their spouse is God's choice for them. Comparison is a killer of joy - a killjoy.

Haggai believed, *"Even if our Temple isn't much in the eyes of man, our obedience will bring pleasure and glory to God! For that reason alone, we should obey."*

Don't listen to the critics and pessimists. Rather than join *the poo-poo club*, sign on to the *faithfulness club*.

Haggai says in verse 4, *"Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,' says the Lord; 'and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,' says the Lord, 'and work; for I am with you,' says the Lord of hosts."* Three times the Lord tells them to *"be strong!"* When someone tries to knock the wind out of your sails be strong in your convictions. The cure for *comparison* is *conviction!*

Haggai says, *"Be strong and work..."* Just keep working. Keep doing what God calls you to do. Most times the key, is to keep our nose to the grindstone.

Once a Bible College student complained to his professor, *"The book we're reading is boring, it's dry."*

The professor replied, *"If the book is dry, why don't you dampen it with a little sweat from your brow."*

And the same is true for us, when our soul gets a little dry we need to apply some sweat from our own brow. Stay at it. Be strong and keep working. The only time *success* comes before ***work is in the dictionary.***

In the past when I've gotten bummed out over a lack of tangible results, and thought of hanging it up, I've discovered the best cure for discouragement is to *just keep working*. Just get back out there. Keep at it!

If you keep working you don't have time to lick your wounds, and indulge in self-pity. Be strong and stay at it. The work keeps you focused in the right direction.

Verse 5, “According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!” Here’s the reason for you to keep working - God’s Spirit is at work in you.

It’s interesting, the Lord references a 900 year old promise - made at Israel’s exodus from Egypt. Yet, it’s still in force. God’s promises stand the test of time.

And when God’s Spirit is among us - no matter what we’ve accomplished thus far - the best is yet to come.

“For thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,’ says the Lord of hosts.

‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘And in this place I will give peace,’ says the Lord of hosts.” This is a phenomenal revelation to Zerubbabel.

The Jewish old timers had *focused on the past*, but God tells Zerubbabel to *look to the future*. Physically speaking his Temple might be “*nothing*” in comparison with Solomon’s Temple, but here the Lord assures him that his Temple will eclipse in glory that of Solomon’s.

The theme of this sermon is don’t be **short-sighted**.

It's interesting, according to the Babylonian Talmud five items were missing from Zerubbabel's Temple that were present in Solomon's... **First**, the **Ark of the Covenant** - **Second**, the **Holy Fire** on the sacrificial altar - **Third**, the **Shekinah glory** (*God's visible presence*) - **Fourth**, the **Spirit of prophecy** (*a prophetic gift provided by the Holy Spirit*) - and **Fifth**, the **Urim And Thummim** (*special stones the priest used to discern God's will*) - yet despite these items the latter temple will be more glorious. *How can that be?*

The answer is in the phrase, *"the Desire of All Nations."* The Jewish rabbis referred to this as a title for the Messiah. And it was to Zerubbabel's Temple that Jesus, God incarnate (in the flesh), came to visit.

Jesus walked its halls, and taught in its porticos.

It was the presence of God's Son that more than made up for whatever this Temple lacked in stature and trimmings. **Jesus is what gave to it a greater glory.**

And the same can be said of a church. Regardless of its size, or programs, or its other tangible qualities, what makes it important is Who visits. If Jesus shows up on Sundays - if His presence fills up every corner - who are we to call it *"nothing."* When Jesus is in the house, it doesn't matter what the house itself looks like.

The story is told of an Scottish pastor that was so discouraged he turned in his resignation. The elders asked him why, he said, **"Cause we haven't had any conversions this year except wee Bobbie Moffat."**

Turns out "wee Bobbie" would later become known as **Robert Moffat** - the great missionary to Africa, responsible for opening up the continent to the Gospel.

This Scottish pastor had been *short-sighted*. What he thought was a wasted year of ministry had actually produced tremendous fruit. **You can't always judge ministerial success by tangible measurements.**

Here, the Lord is saying to Zerubbabel, "Don't worry about building an elaborate Temple. A lack of money is no problem." He reminds them, "*The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine.*" What He needs from them is to obey.

The same is true of us. If you compare our hundreds to other church's thousands we can get discouraged.

But if Jesus shows up, who are we to quibble. If *the Desire of All Nations* is in the house something holy and special is happening. And I want to be a part.

This is why God says to us, "*Be strong and work.*" Don't worry about new cedar. God can provide us what He wants us to have. Just "*Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the Temple.*" **He adds**, when all that can be shaken is shaken, what we build will stand.

Notice, the reference in verses 6-7 to the judgments of the end times. God says, "*Once more (and he adds for us, in a little while), I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations...*"

As He did in the days of Noah, and at the exodus from Egypt, God will again cause an environmental shake-up. Global cataclysms will rock the planet and its nations. Our

new world order will be permanently disrupted. **And this shake-up will cause men to look-up.**

They'll recognize the error of their ways, and turn to Jesus, **"the Desire of All Nations."** And at that time, the Lord of hosts, will fill Zerubbabel's Temple with glory.

Of course, Zerubbabel's Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD - but it could be that God sees it as part of a succession of Temples that will eventually climax with the Millennial Temple, spoken of in the last chapters of Ezekiel. This is the Temple Jesus builds when He returns to Earth and establishes His kingdom.

I once saw a new church building where the architects embedded into the new structure the cornerstone from their former building. It was a symbol of how the old building had played a role in the establishment of the new. It could be this future Temple will somehow display the cornerstone from Zerubbabel's. The new will be an extension of the old.

At the end of the age, the nations will realize they put their hope in the wrong person and in all the wrong things. They'll repent. The nations will desire Jesus.

They'll come to worship Him in His glorious Temple, and experience His peace. *What a day that will be!*

And as fascinating as these verses are, you should know they've had a great impact on our own church.

In 1995, as we contemplated relocating from Stone Mountain Village to our current location, God used these verses to confirm to me it was His will to move.

His Spirit personalized these promises to me. *“The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,” says the Lord of hosts. ‘And in this place I will give peace...’*” God was saying to us He would do greater things in this new building than we had seen in the old. Now 22 years later I can assure you He has.

And this place has been *“a place of peace.”*

During the construction of this building I came out to the worksite one night - and found a young man sitting out-back, praying. He told me there was something peaceful about the property. Even before this building was completed, God was confirming His promise to us.

Over the years - *on these grounds - within these walls -* troubled souls have found God’s perfect peace.

And if you go out back and look at the the sidewalk you’ll find the Scripture reference, Haggai 2:9. I took a stick, and wrote it there when the cement was wet, as a memorial to the promise God had given our church.

Verse 10 begins Haggai’s third sermon. The date is December 18, 520 BC. Its theme is the people’s **self-righteousness**. *“On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, “Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Now, ask the priests concerning the law, saying, “If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?’””* Then the priests answered and said, *“No.”* In other words, holiness is noncommunicable.

Just hanging out or rubbing shoulders with holy people won't make you holy. Holiness isn't contagious.

You can swim in a sea of holy water and it won't make *you* holy. Or you can build a Temple, or even a church - something that is holy to God - but it won't make you any more holy than when you started.

Hanging out with holiness doesn't make you holy. God makes us holy when we give ourselves to Him.

But Haggai has another question, verse 13, **“If one who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean?”** So the priests answered and said, **“It shall be unclean.”** On the other hand, evil is communicable, transmittable, transferrable. This is how we obtained a sinful nature. We inherited it from Adam.

And it's true, keep hanging out with evil people and you'll develop evil habits. It seldom happens in reverse.

Putting a rebellious child with compliant kids rarely makes the rebel submissive - it more likely sours the good kids. One bad apple can spoil the whole bunch.

Evil is contagious. You can contract it from your associates at work, or from the TV, or from the website you visit. This is why we need to stay away from evil.

“Then Haggai answered and said, ‘“So is this people, and so is this nation before Me,’ says the Lord, ‘and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.’” The good work they were doing with their hands, didn't cancel out the evil in their hearts.

In building a holy Temple they weren't becoming *more righteous*, they were becoming *self-righteous*.

And this is the danger in church work. Just being around holy things and religious stuff, doesn't make you *holy*. It's more likely to make you *haughty*. You can become proud of your obedience and service. "*Look at me! See all that I'm doing for the Lord.*" Pride seeps in.

It's true that our hard work brings pleasure and glory to God, but the credit for any success in ministry should go to the Lord alone. He is the enabler. As Zechariah said to Zerubbabel (4:6), It's "*Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.*"

Verse 15, "*And now, carefully consider from this day forward: from before stone was laid upon stone in the temple of the Lord - since those days, when one came to a heap of twenty ephahs, there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty baths from the press, there were but twenty.*" When they were living for themselves God saw to it their yield was reduced. They netted 50% less grain and 60% less oil.

"*I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not turn to Me,' says the Lord. 'Consider now from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid - consider it: Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded fruit. But from this day I will bless you.'*"

Remember Haggai is delivering this sermon in the month of December. That means they've already sowed their seed, *for the harvest they're expecting in the spring*. God is promising to reverse their recent failures, and bring about blessing for their obedience.

“And again the word of the Lord came to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying...” On the same day, Haggai now delivers his fourth sermon.

And from its contents you get the impression that Zerubbabel has been **second-guessing** himself.

Haggai reminds the doubting leader of the glorious promises that lay ahead. Apparently, Zerubbabel was a timid leader. He had some insecurities. I'm not sure he would've finished the Temple if it hadn't been for the *visions of Zechariah and Haggai's encouragement*.

Verse 21, “Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying: ‘I will shake heaven and earth. I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I will destroy the strength of the Gentile kingdoms. I will overthrow the chariots and those who ride in them; the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother.’” This is a description of the end times, when Jesus returns. The Gentile nations will be conquered and the throne will return to Israel and Jerusalem.

‘In that day,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘I will take you, Zerubbabel My servant, the son of Shealtiel,’ says the Lord, ‘and will make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you,’ says the Lord of hosts.” The signet ring was the king's seal - the equivalent of a signature.

Zerubbabel is being told that in the future, rather than second-guessing himself, he'll be making official decrees on behalf of God. God will trust Zerubbabel to make decisions and to be His representative.

During World War 2, and the bombing of Britain, the situation looked grim. One day, two Englishmen met on the street, when one said to the other, "Things look pretty dark, don't they?" To which the man replied, "*But sir, the King says there's hope!*" *What's the king say!*

Zerubbabel was not a self-confident man, yet there was hope for him, *because the King said so!* The same is true for us! There is hope for us, **because Jesus said so!** *Be strong, keep working, God is with you!*

But note the time of Zerubbabel's promotion - God will give to Zerubbabel His signet ring, "*in that day.*"

This is a biblical expression for the end times - the Kingdom Age - when Messiah returns to reign on the earth. This is amazing, but apparently, Zerubbabel, living in the year 520 BC, was being groomed for a job in the Kingdom age, thousands of years into the future.

And what an encouragement to us. Be faithful today, *no matter how insignificant your ministry might seem*, and God will reward you with promotion in the future.

In conclusion, God wants to build a Temple *today* and each of us has a *part to play*. Let's turn from our **self-centeredness**, cease from our **short-sightedness**, repent of our **self-righteousness**, and stop **second-guessing** our usefulness.

Hear the word of God, *“Go up to the mountains, bring wood, build the Temple.”*

Let's be strong, and work, *for God is with us!*