

THRU THE BIBLE SYNTHESIS
"Part XXXI: Haggai - Defining And Overcoming Materialism"

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

(1) People are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet:

(a) Connecticut has the highest gasoline tax in the nation. In fact, so concerned are politicians about this fact that both Connecticut senators are doing double time in the U.S. capitol to get a cut in the gasoline costs, blaming big business. The President is under pressure to cut his four cent a gallon federal tax. Being an election year, this is a hot topic. But people are hurting. One trucker reports on the national news that a month ago it cost him \$40 less to fill up his rig at a service station than it does now. In fact, some independent truckers are parking their trucks simply because operating them causes them to do so at a loss!

(b) The city leaders in Torrington are trying to cut \$100,000 out of the police department in the proposed budget, allowing only one more officer this next year to be added to the department though the police department has requested four more officers. Property owners feel swamped in taxes, and these board members are trying to respond!

(c) In the last year, we have averaged at least one prayer request a prayer meeting regarding the tight fiscal concerns of parties within our Church family! That means that at **all** times, some business owner or family in Nepaug Church is finding it difficult to keep his head above water!

If we are doing our best and still can't get to the top of a problem with finances, what are we missing?! Where should we be looking NEXT for an adjustment, and WHY?!

(We turn to the "Need" section of our sermon . . .)

Need: "No matter how well I try to budget or manage my resources, taxes, the rising cost of living or SOMETHING always seems to cancel out my efforts to make a decent living, let alone to plan for a secure future! Am I missing some thing?! What is the solution?!"

I. **After the Hebrew people failed in their world mission and were judged by the Babylonian Captivity, they returned to Jerusalem only to face the disillusionment of making a hard living.**

- A. Though God created the world and set man up as His deputy, sin deposed him, and Satan became ruler on earth, Gn. 1-5; 2 Cor. 4:4.
- B. The Lord renewed history through the Noahic flood, Gen. 6:1-9:7.
- C. Yet, Noah's descendant, Nimrod, began an apostasy opposing God's rule on earth, Gen. 10:8-10; 11:1-9; Rev. 12:1-3.
- D. God thus chose Abraham to start a nation to check his sin, Gn. 12:1-3.
- E. Yet, after many challenges en route, that nation failed to curb Nimrod's error, and God had to send it into captivity, Gn. 12:4-Daniel.
- F. When God restored Israel to Palestine, she faced an edict to stop temple construction & live in financial hardship, Ez. 4:1-5:1; Hag. 1:6.
- G. This status conflicted with the Covenant material blessings promised to Israel under the Law for **obedience** to God, Dt. 28:1-14. Thus, **somewhere** Israel was **disobedient**, and this needed to be explained!

II. **God used Haggai to define and counter Israel's MATERIALISM, a form of COVETOUSNESS opposed in the Ten Commandments!**

- A. Israel had failed to finish the temple construction according to God's **will** due to subtle covetousness, so God had judged her with woes.
- B. God thus raised up the prophet, Haggai to address this sin as follows:
 1. When Darius' edict came to stop work on the temple, the people **said** that it must not be **God's TIME** to finish it, Haggai 1:1-2.
 2. In reality, **materialism** in the returned exiles had **caused** this crisis:
 - a. When they **should** have finished the temple, the people funneled their money into **luxurious homes** **INSTEAD**, Hag. 1:4 (Ry. St. Bib., KJV ftn. where "ceiled" houses = use of **imported** wood!)
 - b. This **misuse** of assets came via **covetousness**, a **sin**, Ex. 20: 17!
 - c. Since this **misuse** of assets is **materialism**, **materialism** is **sin**!
 - d. Thus, Israel was under **judgment** for **materialism**: God **disciplined** Israel to have **money** woes, including **income shortages** and **inflation** challenges with **purchasing**, 1:6, 9-11!
 3. Thus, Haggai called the people back to building the temple, 1:7-8.
 4. When God hit their **wallets**, the people returned to work, 1:12-15!
- C. Haggai called the people to overcome their materialistic value system and be content with the less elaborate, postexilic temple, Haggai 2:1-9.

1. Veteran exiles who remembered Solomon's great temple grieved when viewing the less glorious one Zerubbabel had built, 2:1-3, 4.
 2. God challenged them through Haggai to cease grieving by recalling how He had provided financial blessings before in taking them as poor slaves out of Egypt to spoil the wealthy Egyptians, Hag. 2:5.
 3. This precedent would be repeated in the Messianic Kingdom when God would **again** spoil Gentiles to construct a great temple, 2:6-9!
- D. Haggai called the priests to impress the people to conquer materialism:
1. God told the priests the people were **corrupt** by materialism, 2:10ff
 2. Yet, were the priests to lead Israel to finish the temple project, God would **keep** supplying all of Israel's material needs, Haggai 2:15-19.

III. **Haggai's contribution to the "thread of redemption" is a personal Messianic triumph for Zerubbabel for his overcoming materialism:**

- A. Though criticized, Zerubbabel had led Israel to rebuild the temple, 2:4.
- B. Accordingly, God promised a significant **personal** triumph for him:
 1. Zerubbabel's grandfather, king Jehoiachin (Mtt. 1:12) had been judged for **coarse** materialism by God to be removed from God's "hand" as a cursed "signet ring" is removed, Jeremiah 22:13-24. This involved an infamous **death** for king Jehoiachin, Jer. 22:18-19.
 2. For **his** leadership in **countering** such materialism, God would honor **Zerubbabel** as a "signet" ring of **honorable authority** in the **Messianic Kingdom** **opposite** the fate of his grandfather, 2:20-23!

Application: If short on funds no matter what, (1) believe on Christ for salvation and come under God's care, Jn. 3:16; Rom. 8:32. (2) Next, (a) confess our sins (1 Jn. 1:9) and (b) rely on God's Spirit (Gal. 5:16-23) to obey Scripture (1 Jn. 2:1ff). (3) Then, (a) whether times are boom OR bust (Phil. 4:11-13), (b) we must be content to work with God's current supply (He. 13:5a, b) and (c) apply Biblical input to correct what materialistic MISUSES we practice with those existing assets (Haggai; He. 13:5). (4) Then (a) God will keep giving to us all the resources we YET need to do His will in the FUTURE (He. 13:5c-6) AND (b) He will reward us in His coming Kingdom!

Lesson: If we FOCUS on possessions as life's GOAL, we incur painful discipline for covetousness and suffer discomfort in times of shortages; but if we FOCUS on God's will, He meets our material needs as a result all the time without our being stressed and rewards us in the age to come!

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

Solomon wrote in Proverbs 6:6-8 that ants teach us to anticipate our future living needs, and faithfully be busy storing up for our future needs a little at a time as ants do. This is powerfully illustrated from a book by a self-made millionaire as follows:

Years ago, James E. Stowers II along with his wife decided that they would do what any other couple could do to invest for their futures. They decided to see where they could cut into the materialistic "fat" in their budgets and invest the savings wisely. (J. E. Stowers, Yes You Can . . . Achieve Financial Independence, p. 195-196, 277):

(a) First, Mr. Stowers noted that instead of using a new razor blade every day, he could save money by shaving with the same blade for several days. This way he could save \$22.50 a month on blades. He took this savings and invested it in a growth fund in his mutual fund company compounding at an average total return of 20% per year.

(b) Next, Mrs. Stowers suggested her husband stop parking in the parking garage while at work and use the street meter instead. He found he could save \$25 a month by doing so. This savings he also invested in the same fund. He thus set aside a total of \$47.50 a month into this growth fund. **(Mr. Stowers added a larger amount to this, but, I have adjusted the yield based only on the above monthly \$47.50 investment as many can reasonably set aside this amount!)**

If he **had**, and he **could** have done so with that fund, and **if** he'd **started** this investment in **1976** (though he actually started in the fifties), he would have seen the \$47.50-a-month razor-blade-and-parking savings turn into a **\$105,482.12** nest egg **today!** In five **more** years, this investment program would yield **\$268,459.11**, an **increase** of **\$162,976.99** from now! And all from taking a razor-blade-and-parking savings of \$47.50 a month and storing it up in investments like ants do in Proverbs 6:6-8!

In the same way, God wants us to utilize the resources He ALREADY supplies us non-materialistically and trust Him for what we still need, and we will have ALL we need!