

God knows our hearts and the situations we collectively inhabit, so he is able to properly challenge us to consider our ways when we fall out of his favor and then feel life's frustrations. God calls us and stirs us through his powerful word to return to him in reverent obedience. No more excuses. Our time has come.

Introduction – The end our series from the OT called Encounters With God. Haggai is incredibly relevant to Christians. It shows us one reason why our desire to encounter God is so often frustrated.

Background – The short book of Haggai is near the end of the OT. It narrates the prophet's ministry to the remnant of Jews who returned to their homeland after being exiled in Babylon for 70 years. The civic and religious leaders, and all the people, have been rebuilding their nation's infrastructure and neighborhoods, but the temple still lies in ruins after an aborted effort to repair it 20 years prior.

I. The Excuse Uncovered

A. God knows your situations (v. 1)

On 8/29/520 BC God spoke. It was the first of the month in the Jewish calendar—the day of the new moon festival in Jerusalem and thus a day of public worship. Trumpets blared. The priests offered the people's sacrifices. The crops were mostly harvested. Godly leaders presided over the people. It was a time for all to rest from their labors and celebrate. But the time was not as happy as it appeared, and God knew it. So the Lord spoke through his prophet Haggai to governor Zerubbabel and high priest Joshua in order to confront the big problem that no one was seriously discussing anymore.

B. God knows your excuses (v. 2)

The source of the problem was the broken-down temple. But the big problem was that no one wanted to do anything about it. They told themselves the time was not yet right to start working. And they had probably convinced themselves this was true for a number of reasons. (1) The last time they tried rebuilding, the opponents killed the project. (2) Wasn't the coming Davidic king supposed to rebuild the temple? It was really God's project—that's what Ezekiel said (Ezek 37:24-28). (3) It had only been 66 years since the Babylonians tore down the temple. Didn't Jeremiah say their exile would be 70 years (Jer 25:11)? God knew all their excuses, and he wasn't buying any of them.

II. The Excuse Dismantled

A. Consider your wacky priorities (vv. 3-4)

How wacky is it that God's temple (the most important house in history) is in shambles while God's people hurry home from their jobs to make their own houses extra nice and comfy with paneling? Paneling possibly refers to wood lining the inner walls and ceiling (1 Kgs 6:9; 7:3, 7; Jer 22:14). It implies a level of personal luxury for that day which is striking compared to the ruined condition of the temple. It sure looks bad on the face of it, but they can't see how absurd they look because everyone is doing it! King David recognized the sense things were out of whack after he had built his own palace while the LORD still dwelt in a tent (2 Sam 7:1-2; 1 Kgs 6:9; Jer 22:13-15). But in Haggai's day the situation is inexcusable. Now God's people prioritize making their homes overly fancy, while their God is homeless!

B. Consider the what and why of your ways (vv. 5-7, 9-11)

After dismantling their wacky priorities, the LORD urged his people to carefully think about whether their choices have led to prosperity or frustration. Then God challenges them to stop and seriously ponder, "Do you think there is a connection between the way you're living and the way life is treating you? The sky withholds rain, the earth withholds crops, and drought conditions hover over every man and animal. These are not peripheral details. I am sovereign over the weather, the earth's produce, and the economy. Remember what you're seeing is spelled out in our covenant (Dt 28:24, 30, 38-40, 48). Now that you see things clearly, what are you going to do about it?"

C. Consider your way out (v. 8)

Verse 8 is God's prescribed remedy. Reorder your priorities and start giving God the glory he deserves. That is the only thing you can do right now to please him. The glory of God is the final and driving reason why the people must rebuild the temple (1 Cor 10:31; Rev 4:11). Bringing God glory is the fundamental reason Christians do everything they do. The "sacrifice" of temple-building will bring God pleasure and glory much like he takes pleasure in the temple sacrifices that give him glory. Rebuilding the temple was critically important because it prepared God's people for the greatest encounter with God: the coming of Jesus Christ. We need Jesus because as the express image and glory of God he is our way out of our excuses, our disobedience, our misplaced priorities, and our sin.

III. The Excuse Rejected

A. We fear, repent, and obey the Lord (v. 12)

Isn't it wonderful that God meets us right where we are? As a loving Father he perfectly disciplines his children in order to turn us from a life of futility and frustration back to a life of glorifying him and finding true fullness. God never makes reorienting our spiritual priorities a complicated task. Rejecting our excuses is actually quite simple, although it takes courageous faith. It begins when you start fearing God more than you fear what you might lose if you give up your excuses and turn to him. Repentance (actually making up your mind to reject your lame excuses) follows when you begin fearing God. And the flowering of repentance is making the turn away from the things that distract you and moving toward God in renewed obedience.

B. The Lord assures, stirs, and empowers us (vv. 13-15)

Notice how God gracefully dances in time with us when we reject our excuses for not giving him first priority in our lives. Fearing God makes us vulnerable. When we're afraid of him, he assures us, "I am with you." When we repent it's tempting to let shame rob us of joy. But God meets our repentance by stirring our spirits to love him again. And when you begin to apply your repentance in obedience, there is a great temptation to serve God "in your own strength." But God meets us at this point of temptation when we obey for our own glory ("Look what I did for God!") by empowering us for spirit-filled obedience ("Look how great is my God!"). When we reject our excuses by fearing, repenting, and obeying God, he promises we will encounter his presence all the way and in every way! God is able and willing to love sinners who are naturally excuse-generators because Jesus made no excuses when the obedience of glorifying God demanded his life as a sacrifice for us. Christ's supreme act of glorifying God, for the love of his excuse-making people, won the love of God for us.

Conclusion – This is the mature paradigm of encountering God. That is the main point of this passage. But don't miss the biblical theme that occasioned this message: God's presence with us in the temple. The temple theme helps us apply the main point. God's house on Mount Zion in Jerusalem was a kind of placeholder, a symbol that pointed forward to the day when God would be with us perfectly. This means

God's call to the Jews to dedicate themselves to rebuild his house is absolutely relevant for Christians today. Just as Jesus is God's temple, we are also his temple since we are in union with Christ. So when you see dysfunction in the church, broken or stalled ministries in the church, or any other problem that is diminishing the glory God deserves, heed God's word through Haggai to rebuild God's house by dealing with your excuses. Encountering God is always, always a call to rightly order our priorities, a call to action, a call to serve, and a call to worship. Consider your ways. Our time has come.