Obey The Lord
Haggai 1:1-11
SS Lesson for 06/01/2014

Devotional Scripture: Rom 6:15-22

OUTLINE

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OVERVIEW AND APPROACH TO LESSON

Key Verse: Hag 1:3-4

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

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From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

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CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM J. STEVEN COLE

1. We all are prone to put our prosperity above God’s house.
A. Those who put their prosperity above God’s house are often committed believers.
B. Those who put their prosperity above God’s house have “reasons” (excuses) for their lifestyles.
C. Those who put their prosperity above God’s house are blind to God’s chastening hand.
D. Those who put their prosperity above God’s house never get what they’re after.

2. We must deliberately and continually put God’s house above our prosperity.
   A. To put God’s house above material prosperity requires deliberate and continual effort.
   B. To put God’s house above material prosperity requires constant self-evaluation in the fear of God.

3. When we put God’s house above our prosperity, He is pleased and glorified, His work gets done, and He truly blesses us.
   A. When we put God’s house above our prosperity, He is pleased and glorified (1:8).
   B. When we put God’s house above our prosperity, His work gets done.
   C. When we put God’s house above our prosperity, He truly blesses us.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY
PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR
Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson admonishes us to Obey the Lord. The study's aim is to see how God leads us and how we are to obey and that there are consequences to our failure to obey. The study's application is to order our lives and establish our habits of thought that we would not even consider disobeying the Lord. (From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary).

Key Verse: Hag 1:3-4

3 Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 4 "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?"

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

Haggai’s addressing the leaders first (Haggai 1:1) emphasizes their responsibility. The message is from the Lord Almighty (lit., “the Lord [Yahweh] of armies”). Haggai used this title of God, “the Lord Almighty,” 14 times! The reference to Judah as these people rather than “My people” implies a divine rebuke because they did not act like the Lord’s people. Their excuse for not building the temple (the time has not yet come) is laid bare in the next verses which describe their misplaced priorities. The word of the Lord was now addressed to the people (you is pl.) mentioned in verse 2, and not just to the leaders. Haggai rebuked the people for their selfish indifference and negligence. They had built their own houses while neglecting to rebuild the house of God (cf. Haggai 1:9). The term paneled houses may only mean that they had roofs over their heads, though the word can also refer to luxurious paneling which may have adorned the houses of the leaders and the more well-to-do people. The Lord exhorted the people to reflect on their conduct in view of their present poverty. Give careful thought to your ways is literally, “Set your hearts on your ways.” Four other times Haggai wrote, “Give careful thought to” (Haggai 1:7; 2:15, 18 [twice]). They needed to reappraise their perverted priorities and give preeminence to God and their relationships with Him. What they had done was deplorable; and it was also fruitless. Their self-centeredness had not produced economic stability. Their abundant plantings had resulted in only meager harvests (cf. 1:10-11; 2:15-17, 19). The simplest necessities of life—food, drink, and clothing—were not being met. The resulting inflation is pictured graphically: You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it. The implication is strong that these economic conditions were divine chastening for disobedience (cf. Lev. 26:18-20; Deut. 28:38-40). All their efforts at farming and wage-earning availed nothing because they had not put the Lord first. Their ancestors who had gone into captivity had experienced the same retribution (cf. Deut. 28:41), but God wanted better things of the returned exiles.

Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

The concept of the outline of the lesson came from a previous SS Lesson dated 06/15/2003 and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

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Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The focus of the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah was to challenge God's people to wake up from 16 years of spiritual slumber, years that had left God's house unfinished and the people themselves unfulfilled. Thus their problem was not that of confronting changes that had occurred during that time; rather, their problem was that nothing had changed because they had neglected to make the completion of God's house a priority. Haggai and Zechariah lived in the post-exilic period of Old Testament history. The "exilic" part of this phrase refers to the tragedy of the Babylonian exile. That deportation occurred in stages, culminating in 586 BC when the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city of Jerusalem. Palestine had been under Babylonian domination for some two decades preceding that tragedy (example: Daniel 1). In 539 BC, Cyrus of Persia conquered the Babylonians, and Persia became the dominant power in the ancient Near East. Soon afterward, Cyrus issued a decree that allowed Jews who so desired to return home and rebuild their house of worship (2 Chronicles 36:22, 23, same as Ezra 1:1-3). It is worth noting that the prophet Isaiah had predicted the rise of Cyrus (by name) and described what that king would do on behalf of God's people (Isaiah 44:24-45:6). That was about 150 years before Cyrus ever appeared on the stage of world history! So in 538 BC some 50,000 Jews traveled to Judah to begin the task of rebuilding the temple (Ezra 2:64, 65). Within two years of their arrival, they had completed the important step of setting the foundation in place. But then opposition to the rebuilding effort surfaced, and the people's enthusiasm began to wane. This opposition originated with those who already resided in the territory when the Jews arrived back—people who had moved in and taken up residence in the land after God's people were exiled. They did not welcome the return of God's people, so these opponents "set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building. They bribed officials to work against them and frustrate their plans... Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia" (Ezra 4:4, 5, 24). The temple remained unfinished for 16 years. As time passed, it became easier and easier to let the task remain undone. It seemed more practical for the people to focus on rebuilding their own homes and pursue their own interests. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah appeared on the scene in the midst of the people's complacency (Ezra 5:1). These men were raised up by the Lord to shake the people out of their lethargy, to stir them to act in order to finish rebuilding the temple. Although the book of Haggai is placed within the Minor Prophets because of its length (only Obadiah is shorter), Haggai played a major role in conveying God's message to a people who had become indifferent to his work.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Obedience Problems to Consider (Hag 1:2-4)

1 In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, 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,
2 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'This people says, "The time has not come, even the time for the house of the LORD to be rebuilt."'
3 Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying,
4 "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?"

Selfish attitudes (1-2)

An attitude of self-interest (John 12:4-6)

4 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 5 "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." 6 He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

An attitude of wickedness and unconcern (Prov 29:7)

7 The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.
An attitude of being a hired hand (John 10:12-13)

12 The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

An attitude of covetness (James 4:1-2)

4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.

An attitude of uncontentment (Eccl 4:8)

8 There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. "For whom am I toiling," he asked, "and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?" This too is meaningless, a miserable business!

An attitude of conceit (1 Tim 6:4-5)

4 he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions 5 and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

Selfish priorities (3-4)

A priority of allowing personal things get ahead of God (Matt 8:21-22)

21 Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 22 But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

A priority of seeking my needs first versus seeking God's kingdom (Matt 6:33)

33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

A priority of wealth at any expense (1 Tim 6:9-10)

9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

A priority of hoarding wealth (James 5:1-5)

5:1 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. 2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. 4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. 5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.

A priority of family ahead of God (Matt 10:37-39)

37 "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38 and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.
Disobedience Consequences to Consider (Hag 1:5-11)

5 Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, "Consider your ways! 6 "You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes."
7 Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Consider your ways! 8 "Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified," says the LORD.
9 "You look for much, but behold, it comes to little; when you bring it home, I blow it away. Why?" declares the LORD of hosts, "Because of My house which lies desolate, while each of you runs to his own house.
10 "Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew and the earth has withheld its produce.
11 "I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands."

Unproductive work (5-6)

Five essential areas in which the people were lacking (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)
Haggai lists five essential areas in which the people are lacking. The first has a certain irony to it. They are really trying to have good harvests in that they planted much, but ultimately they are able to harvest only little. Their expenditures of time, energy, and seed seem to be wasted. The next three deal with the physical necessities of life: food, drink, and clothing. They never seem to have enough of any. To use familiar imagery, they go to bed hungry and cold every night. Keeping warm means putting on more clothing. But in their nicely furnished houses (Haggai 1:4), they never seem to be warm enough. The final item of this five-fold observation is that their wages seemed to be going in a purse with holes in it. It takes all of their resources for what necessities they do have, and there is nothing left over (Isaiah 28:20).

Unproductive because of not listening to God (Lev 26:18-20)
18 "If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. 19 I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. 20 Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of the land yield their fruit.

Unproductive because of past sins (2 Sam 21:1)
1 During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the LORD. The LORD said, "It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death."

Unproductive because of unfaithfulness to God (Hos 4:10-12)
10 "They will eat but not have enough; they will engage in prostitution but not increase, because they have deserted the LORD to give themselves 11 to prostitution, to old wine and new, which take away the understanding 12 of my people. They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God.

Unproductive because of not honoring God (Mal 2:2)
2 If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honor my name," says the LORD Almighty, "I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not set your heart to honor me.
Examine Your Ways (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

Every June the National Basketball Association wraps up its playoffs by crowning a new champion. Years ago, a fan in Portland, Oregon, went to the airport to greet the Trailblazers following a victory over the Los Angeles Lakers. At the airport this fan attempted to make some money by scalping two tickets to the next game. He spotted a well-dressed man and made his move. “How much?” asked the gentleman. “One hundred fifty,” he replied. “Not a cent less.” “Sir, do you realize you’re talking to a plain-clothes officer of the law?” the man asked the scalper. “I’m a detective. What you are doing is illegal and I’m going to turn you in.” Suddenly the seller began to backpedal. He talked about his large family and his financial need. He promised never to do it again. Looking both ways the well-dressed man said, “Just hand over the tickets and we’ll call it even.” And he did. “Now get out of here and I better never catch you here again!” What a close call! But that well-dressed man was no compassionate cop. He was just a quick-thinking opportunist who used imagination and guts to land two choice seats to the next playoff game. He anonymously admitted it in the local newspaper a few days later. It hurts when others deceive us. But to live in the blindness of self-deception is even worse. God called Israel to examine their ways. Haggai 1:6-9 makes it clear that many in Israel were robbing themselves by their lack of self-examination. Take an honest look at your life. Any holes in your bag?

Unproductive because of not depending on God to guide and empower (Ps 127:1-2)

127:1 Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. 2 In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat--for he grants sleep to those he loves.

Unproductive because of relying on human efforts (Luke 5:5)

5 Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

Unproductive because it is God, not man, who makes all things happen (1 Cor 3:6-9)

6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

Unproductive because of working outside of God's Will (Isa 49:4)

4 But I said, "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God."

Withheld blessings (10-11)

Blessings withheld because of people turning away from God (Amos 4:7-8)

7 "I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up. 8 People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.

Blessings withheld because of sin against God (1 Kings 8:35)

35 "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and confess your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them,

Blessings withheld because people will not humble themselves, repent and pray to God (2 Chron 7:13-15)

13 "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, 14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. 15 Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place."
Blessings withheld because of unrighteousness  (Isa 5:5-7)
5 Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. 6 I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it. 7 The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

Blessings withheld because of stubbornness and rebellion  (Jer 5:23-25)
23 But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away. 24 They do not say to themselves, ‘Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives autumn and spring rains in season, who assures us of the regular weeks of harvest.’ 25 Your wrongdoings have kept these away; your sins have deprived you of good.

Blessings withheld because people won't worship God  (Zech 14:17-19)
17 If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, they will have no rain. 18 If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. The LORD will bring on them the plague he inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. 19 This will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.

Blessings withheld because of corrupt leaders  (Zech 10:1-2)
Ask the LORD for rain in the springtime; it is the LORD who makes the storm clouds. He gives showers of rain to men, and plants of the field to everyone. 2 The idols speak deceit, diviners see visions that lie; they tell dreams that are false, they give comfort in vain. Therefore the people wander like sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts From J. Steven Cole

The Book of Haggai consists of four precisely dated messages from the Lord. The first (1:1-15) was on the first day of the sixth month in the second year of Darius (1:1, August 29, 520 B.C.). The second (2:1-9) came on the 21st of the seventh month (2:1, October 17th). The third (2:10-19) and fourth (2:20-23) messages came on the same day, the 24th of the ninth month (2:10, 20; December 18th). To sum up the first message:

God will grant true blessing when we put His house first.

Charles Feinberg (The Minor Prophets [Moody Press], p. 240) put it, “In short, Haggai is saying, ‘Give God the supreme place in your life.’” Or, as Jesus put it, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you” (Matt. 6:33). We all know this, but …

1. We all are prone to put our prosperity above God’s house.

This is the default mode on all of our fallen “computers”! If we give no thought to how we’re living, we will naturally live for our agendas, not for God’s. All of us who have trusted Christ as Savior know (intellectually) that it is foolish and vain to live for the things of this world. We know that these things never deliver the satisfaction that they promise. We know that we will not find true happiness apart from God. And yet we keep drifting towards loving the world if we don’t fight against it. Note four things about those who put their prosperity above God’s house:

A. Those who put their prosperity above God’s house are often committed believers.

We would not understand Haggai’s message properly if we forgot that the people to whom he was speaking had made the difficult commitment to leave their established way of life in Babylon and make the dangerous journey back to the land of promise. They had homes and jobs in Babylon. Most of them had been born and raised there. But they knew that God’s purpose for His people involved the Promised Land. By faith they had responded to the call to return and
had committed themselves to the hardships of getting re-established in the land that had been devastated by war. Probably most of them made that commitment because of their commitment to God.

Shortly after returning, they had made an attempt to rebuild the Temple, but the opposition had stopped the project. Gradually, they had lost their vision and had drifted into a lifestyle where God’s house was no longer the priority. They probably viewed it as nice, but not necessary; extra, but not essential.

We need to see ourselves in this picture. If you know Christ, there was a time when you made a personal commitment to Him. You decided to follow Jesus, as the chorus goes. At first, you were zealous for spiritual things. You read your Bible every day. You got involved with groups like Campus Crusade or Inter-Varsity during college. You got involved serving in a local church. But perhaps your efforts met with difficulties. You had a personality clash with another Christian, or you were disillusioned with the disappointing results, or you encountered personal trials that God didn’t remove, even after much prayer.

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 still attend church as often as you can, but it has become a slice of life, not the center. You tell yourself that you just don’t have time to serve as you used to. Someone else who doesn’t have the responsibilities that you have will have to get involved. Without deliberately rebelling against God, you have drifted into putting your house above God’s house. When your conscience nags, you have reasons to explain why things are this way:

B. Those who put their prosperity above God’s house have “reasons” (excuses) for their lifestyles.

They were saying, “The time has not come, even the time for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt” (1:2). If you had asked them why the temple had not been built, they would have responded, “Don’t get me wrong! I’m all for rebuilding the Temple. It’s a great cause. But the timing just isn’t right. We’re in an economic downturn right now. Everyone’s pinched for money. There aren’t enough good jobs. It’s all I can do to provide for my family. But times will get better, and then we’ll rebuild the temple!”

Again, we must see ourselves here! We’re all prone to make up excuses for why we are not obedient to put God first with the time and money He entrusts to us. Sometimes we even use the Bible to support our excuses. “The Bible says that if a man doesn’t provide for his own family, he’s worse than an unbeliever and has denied the faith! I’m just trying to obey that verse by providing for my family. But someday I’ll have all the kids through college and the bills paid, and then we’ll give more to the Lord’s work.” Or, “This is a hectic time in our family life. The kids demand so much attention. Every day is taken up with meeting their needs. But someday we’ll be through this phase, and then we’ll get involved in the church.”

C. Those who put their prosperity above God’s house are blind to God’s chastening hand.

The people in Haggai’s day were having problems. They sowed plenty of seed, but there was a drought and the crops didn’t yield as much as they had hoped. That meant that they had less to sow the following year, even though they needed to make up for the previous bad year. No matter how hard they tried, they just seemed to be spinning their wheels. Inflation seemed to gobble up the little bit that they earned. It was like putting money into a bag with holes (1:6). By the end of the month, there was nothing left. Of course the hard times meant that they didn’t have any extra to give toward the temple building fund. But surely God understood their difficult circumstances!

What they didn’t see was that God not only understood their circumstances, He had caused them! They were working harder but going behind faster, but they hadn’t stopped to consider that God was trying to tell them something. Haggai came along and said, “Hey, folks, it’s God who controls the rain and the harvest. He is withholding His blessing because your priorities are not right! Put His house first and He will bless you. Seek first His kingdom and all these things will be added unto you.”

People who slip into putting their prosperity above God’s kingdom have lost the spiritual perspective they need to get out of the quicksand they’ve fallen into. They’re working for the food that perishes, but not for the food that endures to eternal life (John 6:27). They’re forgetting that if their ways are pleasing to the Lord, He will give them all that they
really need. They need to stop and consider that they are working against God, who merely blows on their take-home pay and scatters it (1:9). He does that to get them to reconsider their mixed up priorities.

D. Those who put their prosperity above God’s house never get what they’re after.

Some of these people had a measure of material success. They lived in fine, paneled houses (1:4). But the point of verses 6 & 9-11 is, even if you get what you’re working for, it never satisfies. Solomon, who tried money, fame, knowledge, sensual pleasure, and everything a man could dream of, ended up cynically saying, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!” (Eccl. 1:2). In the words of the Rolling Stones, “I can’t get no satisfaction”!

What good does it do to work hard all your life so that you can retire and enjoy the good things in life, if a month after your retirement, you have a heart attack and die? You have just put your wages into a purse with holes! What good does it do to build bigger barns to hold your increased wealth if God says, “You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?” (Luke 12:20)?

History is strewn with people that devoted themselves to climbing the ladder of worldly success, only to find out too late that it was leaning against the wrong wall! Sadly, some of those people have been God’s people who just drifted downstream with the world. The truth is, only God can satisfy your soul. As Jesus promised, when we put God and His kingdom first, He gives us all the material things we need. But we have to fight constantly the drift toward wrong priorities.

2. We must deliberately and continually put God’s house above our prosperity.

Let me clarify what I mean by “God’s house.” In our text, of course, it refers to the temple in Jerusalem, which was the center for worshiping God. Although God is everywhere, the temple was the place on earth where God dwelled in a special sense. He revealed His glory there. The sacrifices offered there pointed ahead to the coming of God’s Messiah, Jesus, who would offer Himself as God’s final and complete sacrifice for our sins. To allow the Temple to lay in ruins was to neglect the worship of God. It was to have inverted priorities, and as James Boice puts it, “in the final analysis all inverted priorities are idolatry. They put the creation before the Creator” (The Minor Prophets [Baker], 2:469).

In the church age, God’s temple is not a physical building, but rather, His people, both individually and corporately (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16). God dwells in individual human hearts, and together we are being built into the temple or house of God (Eph. 2:21; 1 Pet. 2:5). To make God’s house the priority in life means that your number one aim is to make your body a fit dwelling for the Holy Spirit and to devote yourself to building others in Christ so that their lives are a proper dwelling for God. It means that your main goal is to know Christ at home in your heart by faith and to do all that you can to help others do the same. Note two things:

A. To put God’s house above material prosperity requires deliberate and continual effort.

As I said, our default mode is to put material prosperity above spiritual prosperity. That is the strong pull of the world. If we want to go God’s way, we have to fight every inch of the way.

It is striking that in contrast to many of the prophets, like Jeremiah, who preached all their lives to stubborn and disobedient people, Haggai preached and the people obeyed! It started with the leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua (1:12). That took humility on their part. It would have been easy for them as the political and spiritual leaders to resist Haggai’s message in order to preserve their esteem in the eyes of the community. “Who does this upstart prophet think that he is? We’ve never heard of him before. He has no credentials. He just comes along and says, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts’ and we’re supposed to believe him?’” Yes, they were, and thankfully they did!

It’s interesting that proportionately, Haggai claims to speak the word of the Lord more than any other prophet in Scripture (25 times in 38 verses) and he refers to God as “the Lord of hosts” 14 times. He is saying, “God is the Lord over all the armies of heaven and earth, and I am bringing you His message, so you’d better listen!” In this case, the people did listen and obey.

The application is that we must accept the Bible as the authoritative word of the Lord of hosts and submit to it. When it confronts the way we live, we can either resist it by making up more excuses, or we can obey it. But one-time obedience is not enough. We must deliberately and continually obey if we want to keep our priorities in order. How do we do that?
B. To put God’s house above material prosperity requires constant self-evaluation in the fear of God.

Twice the Lord tells the people, “Consider your ways” (1:5, 7). That means to stop long enough in your busy schedule to evaluate your life in the light of God’s Word and fearing Him (1:12).

(1) How are you spending your time? These people had plenty of time for themselves, but they didn’t have time for God. Rearrange your schedule!

(2) How are you spending your money, which is really God’s money? These folks claimed that they had to get their own houses built first, and then they could build God’s house. That was backwards. God says that we are to give Him the first fruits, off the top. We are to give Him the best. We are managers of all that He has given us, to invest it profitably for His kingdom.

(3) What are your goals? What is it that you’re aiming at in life? If you live to an old age, what do you want to look back on as far as accomplishments?

(4) What do you think about the most? What secretly occupies your thought life? Do you dream of getting rich, of achieving fame, of some hobby or leisure pursuit, or do you think about the Lord and how He wants you to spend your life?

(5) Who are your heroes or models? Whom do you most admire? Whom would you like to be like? Why?

(6) Who are your friends? Whom do you like to spend time with? Why do you like to be with them?

(7) How do you spend your leisure time? When you have time off, how do you spend it? Do you watch TV? Do you live for sports? Do you hang out with friends? How does your leisure time reflect and affect your devotion to Jesus Christ?

It’s helpful to write down your goals and re-evaluate every so often to see where you’re at. Otherwise, you drift off course.

Undergirding all of these questions should be the fear of God (1:12). Some think that the fear of God is an Old Testament concept, and that we are to focus on His love. But the New Testament has plenty of references to fearing God (Matt. 10:28; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 5:21; Col. 3:22; 1 Pet. 2:17; Rev. 14:7; 15:4; 19:5). While we do not need to fear His final judgment if we are in Christ, Peter tells us, “If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth” (1 Pet. 1:17).

What is the result when we reverently obey God by putting His house above our material prosperity?

3. When we put God’s house above our prosperity, He is pleased and glorified, His work gets done, and He truly blesses us.

A. When we put God’s house above our prosperity, He is pleased and glorified (1:8).

God is looking for pleasure and glory from His people. The main problem when we fail to put His house first is that we are indifferent to His glory. I commend to you John Piper’s deep, but worth wrestling with, God’s Passion for His Glory [Crossway Books], which includes the full text of Jonathan Edwards’ The End for Which God Created the World.

God created and called a people for Himself for His glory (Isa. 43:7). Our aim should be God’s glory.

B. When we put God’s house above our prosperity, His work gets done.

The Lord stirred up the hearts of the leaders and the people (1:14), “and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God.” While we are responsible to get our priorities in order, when we do it, it is because God has moved in our hearts. As I said recently, whatever you do to pay bills, the chief business of every Christian is to extend the kingdom of God.
C. When we put God's house above our prosperity, He truly blesses us.

When the people obeyed, God sent word, “I am with you” (1:13). If we have God with us, we have everything. If God is with us and for us, who can be against us (Rom. 8:31)? If God seems distant in your life, perhaps your priorities have gotten mixed up. When you put God truly in first place, you experience a new awareness of His presence. That is true blessing!

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Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Today's study notes the link between obedience to God and material prosperity that was a vital part of the covenant relationship that existed between God and Old Testament Israel. We should be cautious about carrying over such a link and applying it to God's people today (Christians). Nowhere does the New Testament establish the kind of strong connection between obedience and material prosperity that we see evidenced, for example, in today's text from Haggai. As with many such topics, balance seems to be a worthy goal. Yes, God will take care of his people (example: Matthew 6:33). But we are also told that "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). The lack of material prosperity rather than its abundance may, in some cases, be an indication that one is serving God faithfully. Even so, the issue of priorities still confronts us today (Luke 17:7, 8).

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. It is important not only to start God's work but also to finish it (Hag. 1:1; cf. Ezra 3:8-13)
2. Man's excuses may fool others but never God (Hag. 1:2)
3. Our actions—rather than our words—are the best indicator of our priorities (vss. 3-4)
4. The wise man regularly examines his actions, priorities, and loyalties (vss. 5-6)
5. True repentance requires full obedience (vss. 7-8)
6. God's people should expect God's discipline when they disobey (Hag. 1:9-11; cf. Prov. 3:12; Heb. 12:6)