

Haggai Chapters 1-2 - John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is "A New Beginning". To explain that title, I should give the background of what was happening in Israel when it was written. He was the first of three prophets that did speak to the Israelites after being in captivity for 70 years by the Babylonian Empire (part of Iraq today). Realize this empire attacked Israel three times. When they first defeated Israel, they put a descendant of King David in charge, who rebelled against them. By the third time they attacked, that emperor had enough of Israel's rebellion and leveled Jerusalem. The Israelites who survived were relocated in the Babylonian Empire. When another empire (the Persians for short) destroyed the Babylonians, this new entity allowed the Israelites to go home. When that announcement was made, most Israelites had settled down within that empire. When the Persians said, "You all can go home to rebuild your country now" only about 50,000 people took them up on that offer. This is known from history and from the book of Ezra.
 - a) The point is only a small percentage of the Israelites were willing to give up their lives in that empire to have a new beginning (there's a clue) back in Israel. This book is effectively oriented toward those 50,000 who were willing to have a new beginning as God's people.
 - b) The problem became after 18 years back in that land, the Israelites who resettled there got guilty of ignoring God. His temple that was destroyed by the Babylonians. Those who've moved back were only focusing on rebuilding their economy, by growing crops that were the staple of that economy.
 - c) To state what may be obvious, God sent this guy Haggai on the scene, to encourage those living in the land to rebuild the temple. Before I give my "why should I care" lecture, the temple the Israelites built at this time (around 500 BC), was later leveled during when the Greek Empire ruled the Middle East. When the Romans conquered most of the world, it was Herod the Great, under Roman rule, who rebuilt the temple from the foundation up. Herod's temple existed at Jesus' time. It stood until 70AD, when the Romans themselves got tired of the Israelites rebelling and like the Babylonians 600 years earlier, the Romans said, "enough of this" and leveled the place. There hasn't been a temple to God there since that time. OK, now that you know a little history of God's temple, I can better explain my lesson title and of course, why we should care.
2. To explain why, first I need to quote Jesus, (which is always a good thing to do in a bible study): He said, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." That's Matthew 6:33 (NIV). To understand how that quote is relevant to this study, Let me explain it from the Israel's perspective, and then I'll explain how it applies to us:
 - a) The mistake the Israelites were making is they were trying to "make it" on their own in the land. Realize that God effectively said this little piece of real estate (Israel) is My land. The temple is going to be a temple for all nations. (See Isaiah 56:7). What I'm getting at is being in God's land isn't enough. To have a "New Beginning" as far as God is concerned, He has to be the center of it. Back then, it meant the Israelites needed to build the Temple to have God be the center of that focus. Since that temple has not stood since 70AD, Judaism made a big change to "good works" for justification before God. Coming back to Matthew 6:33, it means God promises if we seek Him first, then all our other needs will fall into place.
 - i) That's what the Israelites had to learn in these two chapters.
 - b) So what does that mean practically? Does it mean we won't have a successful life unless we never miss church on Sunday? Not exactly. My view of going to church is strictly to show gratitude for what God's done, for me, not to try to earn anything from Him or prove my worth to Him. Then I go with the attitude of helping others if the opportunity arises. OK, then, back to the question: Practically, it means we have the attitude that God comes first in life, we seek Him daily, pray to Him and do our best to live by His rules.

- c) We are to live that way, not to earn His love, but out of gratitude for what He's done for us. That's what Jesus meant in Matthew 6:33. That's also why God wanted the Israelites to rebuild the temple, not to earn His love or even match what the millions that Solomon spent on His temple, but to show the world that God is the center of their and our lives.
 - d) That leads me back to the idea of A New Beginning. We may be in a situation where we are staring over in some capacity. We may be "humming along" with our lives. It is not the specifics of the situation as much as it is our attitude. God cares about our lives and He wants us to be His witnesses to the world. That's why we're here in the first place. It begins by us making God the center of our lives. Then and only then can we live how He wants us to live. That's the "New Beginning" that God constantly desires for all of us.
3. So is that it? Haggai telling the Israelites to go build that temple and then go back to their lives? Not exactly. While Haggai is a short book (broken into two chapters much later), the underlying message is that God's got great things planned for those who trust in Him. Parts of the book get "millennial" on us as God explains the long-term benefits for trusting Him. Yes, it got built and as I said early in the introduction, it was destroyed a few hundred years later. That should never be an excuse to avoid building it. God wanted the Israelites to make Him the center of their lives. As the Israelites returned to their homeland, it was important symbolically to show by building that temple that God is center of n their lives. The existence of the temple is the proof of that.
- a) So if all of that is true, why doesn't modern Israel rebuild the temple? The traditional spot where Israel believes the temple was located is under "neutral ownership" and no Israelite is allowed to pray on that spot. Some argue it's a different spot, but let's just say it's a big controversy and it hasn't happened yet. Revelation speaks of a temple being built during its time era that the antichrist "messes up". The last 9-chapters of Ezekiel tell of another temple that will be built "post bad-revelation" stuff. My point is the bible tells us that the world's not through with the existence of the official Jewish temple.
4. As to the who, what, where's and why's of this book, I'm going to discuss that when I discuss the first few verses, as Haggai sums all that up to start this book. As opposed to many of the Minor Old Testament Prophets where it's a "best guess" work on the background, we pretty much know the exact dates this book was written, where it was written and who it was written to. My point is all of that is not an issue for this book.
5. Therefore, let me breakdown, discuss this two-chapter book verse by verse as I discuss what it is God wants us and them to understand about the idea of New Beginning.
6. Chapter 1, Verse 1: In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest:
- a) Realize there are only a few bible books that go through the time and trouble to blatantly tell us the who, what, when and why's of the book. Luke comes to mind. Haggai is also good in that he tells us the exact date, God gives Haggai a handful of visions in this book. Haggai explains who are the main recipients of this book. Let me explain:
 - i) When it came to life in Israel after the return of the captivity, there are two history books (Ezra and Nehemiah) and three prophecy books, with Haggai being the first of them. Haggai is listed in Ezra as a prophet of God, so there's the cross-reference of him being a legitimate prophet. Haggai's name means festive. That's why many scholars think he was born on a Jewish holiday. Haggai's name ties to his book as he wants to get the temple going so the Israelites can observe the Jewish festivals.
 - ii) The next thing we get is the when. Until the Babylonian captivity, most bible dates were based on the Israel king in power. Now that the Israelites are home again but part of the Persian Empire, so the emperor's name is listed for a date reference. The date given is the first day of the month. The Jewish calendar is based on the lunar cycle and the first day is the new moon. To translate all of this in our vocabulary, this was in August of the year 520BC.

- iii) The book of Ezra talks about the Israelites first returning to the land. That's how I know there were about 50,000 who returned. (See Ezra 2:64.) Anyway, Ezra tells us the Israelites laid the foundation for the temple. After being harassed by "locals" they stopped working on it. They built houses and farmed for survival. The point is they stopped working on the temple.
 - iv) That's where Haggai comes in. They were ignoring God in their new beginning in the land of Israel and God gave him this message to encourage those Israelites for them to get at it!
 - v) The final part of Verse 1 tells us that Haggai was writing to Zerubbabel. That man was the civil leader of this group who came to Israel. It's also to Jehozadak, who is the high priest. Zerubbabel was a descendant of the kings of Israel. Obviously, he wasn't a king as Israel is now part of the Persian Empire. Still he was made leader of the Israelites at that time. Jehozadak was the high priest and the descent of the last one, before the Babylonians took everyone left in Israel captive.
 - b) One thing that bothered me before I move on. I wondered if God has a message for these two specific guys, why didn't God just tell them directly? The answer is (as best I can tell) is that God wanted to use Haggai as a prophet. The civil and spiritual leaders should go do their job and lead the people. I suspect having God give the message to a separate prophet is His way of saying, "Who I pick as a prophet, will be a prophet. Since the leaders already exist based on inheritance, I'll use the prophet to give the message and everyone is then to follow suit on what the country's leaders are doing."
 - c) OK bottom line time. God gave this message to Haggai in 520 BC to encourage Israelites to make God the center focus of their lives as a new beginning of being a witness for Him.
 - d) Meanwhile, we're ready for Verse 2.
7. Verse 2: This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, `The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.'"
- a) To understand this verse, it's helpful to understand a little of the book of Ezra. That book gave a good historical account of the Israelites returning to that land and why those who returned started and stopped building the temple. The short version of Ezra 4 and 5 tells us that the Israelites laid the foundation when they first came there. Then some who lived there discourages the Israelites and they stopped building. Ezra tells us of an 18-year time gap between the time the Israelites stopped and when Verse 2 here in Haggai occurs.
 - b) The point being that Ezra gives the historical account of what happened. Haggai is telling us God's message of encouragement at that time. When life isn't going well, the easy thing to think is it's not God's will to do something right now. When we get discouraged we can easily put off a project. Sometimes God just wants us to go forward despite the difficulty and finish the task at hand.
 - c) A gift that some people have is that of encouragement. Each of us can get down at times. We can be struggling and not sure what to do next. I've always grateful for friends in my life who've encouraged me when I'm struggling. I look back at life and realize that God's used me to encourage others both in this ministry and in life in general. Encouragement is a necessary part of life and can do wonders when we're at our own crossroads and are scared to move forward.
 - d) To restate more of Ezra, the Israelites were thinking, "The locals are discouraging us from rebuilding the temple, it must not be God's timing to do this right now". That's essentially what Haggai is saying here. Haggai's job is going to explain why it is God's will for them to go forward and rebuild the temple despite that problem.
 - e) That leads to the big question: What's God's will for us right now? Obviously, I can't give an answer to each person reading this. All I can do is say, "Do what is logical assuming it is not a violation of God's word. Commit one's life to making a difference for Jesus, pray for His guidance, and then do what's logical". That's God's will for us at this moment.

- f) Meanwhile, the logical answer for a bunch of Israelites who fairly recently moved back to the land of Israel is that the first order of business is to establish God as being the center of their life. That meant rebuilding the temple despite the hardship involved in that project.
 - g) With that thought in mind, let's look at Verse 3.
8. Verse 3: Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: ⁴ "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"
- a) Recall back in Verse 1, that Haggai announced who this message is specifically for: Those two leaders who were in charge of the Israelites who moved back there: The religious one and the government leader. The point being that these two leaders, built nice homes to go live in, while The Temple itself was still in ruins. I'm sure the picture of those two leaders nice houses versus the "empty" temple made a nice visual comparison for all the Israelites to see at that point.
 - b) Now think back to my lesson title of a New Beginning. When we're more focused on our personal lives than we are on God, that's an obvious sign that we are in obvious violation of Matthew 6:33. Let me repeat it: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Let's be honest, if all we care about is having a nice place to live, a nice job or food on the table, that's pretty good evidence that we're ignoring what God calls us to do.
 - i) What about all the "successful" people of this world who ignore God? My view is to let them enjoy this life as that's all the joy they'll have for eternity. Obviously we should witness to them if we have a chance. God wants us to be grateful we have been separated for His sake, and use our lives as a witness for Him. That should always be a priority in our lives. Matthew 6:33 promises that God will take care of all our other needs if we put Him first. That's what those Israelites needed to learn and is a reminder to us of lives priorities for the believer.
 - ii) Speaking of teaching what should be obvious for the Christian, I present Verse 5:
9. Verse 5: Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. ⁶ You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."
- a) Haggai is making a "cause and effect" statement here. He's saying the reason none of you are getting what you hope to get is (implying) effectively because they're not making God the center the lives. The more literal aspect is the harvest of their work isn't what they've wanted in the first place. It's the idea that they're not satisfied with what they've gotten.
 - b) That leads to a principal that most of us have learned in life, "God created us with a "hole" (for a lack of a better term) that only He can fill. That means God created us with desire to worship something greater than us. All people want to worship something, even atheists. One can make all sorts of things into gods. See where someone spends their free time and their spare income and you'll find their god.
 - c) Remember that the Israelites who moved back there, were probably religiously devout or else they wouldn't want to move there in the first place. They wrongly concluded as they were getting harassed about building the temple, that it wasn't God's timing to do so.
 - d) Haggai's saying in his own colorful way, "Can't you see you're missing something? Can't you see that God's not blessing each of you as you desire to be blessed? Can't you see that the temple's not standing and things aren't going as planned?"
 - e) I'm not saying the solution to all our problems is to go to church more. I'm saying that the solution to whatever problem we're dealing with begins with seeking Him first. When we make God a central part of our lives, then and only then can He guide us and use us so we can make a difference for Him. A promise that God makes to believers is He will provide for our basic needs if we make Him the center of our lives. It's not a promise of riches and blessings in this life, but of guidance and peace when God's the center of our lives.

10. Verse 7: This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. ⁸ Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the LORD. ⁹ "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. ¹⁰ Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. ¹¹ I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands."
- a) I can summarize these five verses in one thought: We can't wish things to be better unless we do the footwork! Using this temple as an example, we can't pray that God just makes a structure appear out of thin air! God will never do for us what we can do for ourselves even if that means hard work in order to accomplish that goal.
 - b) The idea of a New Beginning does not mean we can kick back on a couch and watch God do everything for us. Coming back to the example of these verses, Haggai commands the Israelites to go cut down some trees and start building the temple. The reason God hasn't blessed the Israelites economy is because they're not making God the central focus of their lives. That's why Haggai tells us God allowed a drought to occur so the Israelites can put "Two and two together" and figure out their priorities were not right.
 - c) All of this leads to a few obvious questions: Is every drought God ordained? No idea and I wouldn't put it past Him. I do know historically a lot of farmers who don't fear God will try prayer out of desperation in times of droughts. Sometimes I think God's saying to the farmer's "Hey good to hear from you, it's been awhile!"
 - d) My point is God wants a relationship with people. Therefore, He'll go to drastic measures like this if needed in order to have that relationship. Again, I have no idea if every disaster is God ordained, but I just know such disasters are opportunities for us to seek Him so He can guide us what to do through such times.
 - e) Let me try this one more way before I move on. Suppose we're dealing with a very tough situation and the results didn't go the way we wanted. Do we blame God? I can recall a few deaths of relatives from cancer that were painful to go through. I'm convinced we are not entitled to the answer to all mysteries in this lifetime. As I was taught a long time ago, when we get to heaven, the only answer we'll get out of mouths is "Oh". As in God, why did You allow this or that to happen? We'll say, "Oh, as in that's why You allowed it!" It may not have been our will, but acceptance of His will is a big part of any new beginning.
 - f) Anyway, the Israelites back then were suffering a God ordained drought as they failed to seek Him as He desired. So what was the results of Haggai's message here?
11. Verse 12: Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD.
- a) This reads like the "Happily Ever After" ending here. The Israelite leaders had the strong sense of conviction and the Israelites living there at that time said, "OK we messed up, let us go build the temple, and that'll solve that".
 - b) OK where's my Haggai? Why doesn't God send me a messenger to tell me exactly what it is He wants or make it obvious to me how to solve all my problems? Why is my life such a mess? How do I fix it? Where's my Haggai? To state the obvious, life doesn't work that way. Life is difficult and change to a New Beginning is painful and difficult. As I love to say, the next step is usually doing what's obvious. For the Israelites, it meant traveling to the nearest forest area, cut down trees and build a temple. For us, what's logical may just be the next step for today. What God promises is that if we seek His guidance, if we trust in Him, He will lead us, and provide us the boldness to take that next logical step, as to go make the difference for Him that He desires. God never says it'll be easy. He promises us joy in life if we start going down the path He desires for us at this time.

- c) To state the obvious, this isn't the end of the book. In this two-chapter book, God gives to Haggai five separate short messages. A common term used in starting a new life is called, "Baby Steps". What that means is if we don't have the strength to accomplish a major goal God will often work in "baby steps" as in just doing the next logical step. It's about letting go of the worries about the future and just taking small "baby steps" to do the right thing at the next moment. I bring that up here, as it leads us perfectly into Haggai's next vision:
12. Verse 13: Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: "I am with you," declares the LORD. ¹⁴ So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God, ¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius.
- a) In these verses is where Haggai speaks to all those who moved to Israel. God has "stirred up" the spirit of the governor and the high priest. If you go back to Verse 1, Haggai said he gave his first message to the leaders on the 1st day of the 6th month. The temple work started on the 24th day of the same month. Since his first message was to the leaders, the time gap was a few weeks before work began. Remember that word had to travel around Israel by "word of mouth". By the time the leaders got enough people to begin on it, that took a few weeks.
- b) One thing that puzzles me is how did God "stir the spirit" of the two leaders? I view it as an urge someone can't stand not doing. Could they have resisted? Sure, but I find that is when God makes our life miserable when we refuse to do what we feel like doing. Was it anything special? Let's put it this way, God didn't write across the sky, "Start building it as I (God) say so". I can see the spiritual leader wanting a place to work. The other (civil) leader could later make a political statement about getting God's work done.
- c) OK John, this is neat ancient history. As you told us earlier, this temple was destroyed at the time the Greek's started ruling that area. Why should I care about all this history? It is not to be an expert on ancient Israel history. It's to learn that God can and does "stir us up" so that we desire to do His will. As an example, I write these lessons not for money, but because I believe that's what God called me to do. Others get involved in projects to make a difference for God. Just as God stirred up the spirit of "everyday people" in Israel back then, so He can and does stir up our spirit to do things for me.
- i) Well then, where do I start? First, don't wait for a sign in the sky saying go do this or that. My ministry began by trial and error and God leading me down a specific direction. I like to ask, what do you enjoy doing? How can one combine what one enjoys to make a difference for God? Then there's doing what's practical. As I like to joke, I've never met a person who's spiritual gift is taking out the trash, but that has to be done. Pray and ask God where you can make a difference. Ask the staff at one's church where they need help. Don't do things out of guilt, but do it out of gratitude for what God's done for us. Again, find things one enjoys and of course have a balance between other needs in our lives versus projects for God.
- d) Well, that's Chapter 1. The project started and we've got a new beginning for those living in Israel at that time. So why have a Chapter 2? Let's read and find out.
13. Chapter 2, Verse 1: On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: ² "Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, ³ `Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?
- a) The short version is God's still speaking to Haggai in "baby steps". The first steps were to get the Israelites started on making a difference for God. We are now a month later here in Chapter 2. Again, God wants Haggai to speak to the two head guys.

- b) What one has to understand is the issue of "keep going". Let's face it, most things are fun on "Day 1". By "Day 30" people are thinking, "how much more of this do I have to do"?
 - c) The issue at this point is encouragement. I'm sure Haggai himself lent a hand in actually building the thing. I don't think Haggai laid on a couch claiming, "Hey, I've got to wait to see if God's got another message for me, so you guys do the work and I'll let you know if God has something else to say." Haggai strikes me as a hands-on kind of guy. He's listed in the book of Ezra as one who helped and I suspect he worked as hard as anyone on the temple project. He was also the encourager. Let me explain this with a little background.
 - d) The last temple that stood there, was built hundreds of years earlier by King Solomon. He was most likely the richest man who ever lived then. I have read estimates that the gold used for Solomon's temple was worth between \$20 million and \$100 million. We are now a few hundred years in the future. This temple was built out of wood. I'm sure among those in the crowd were a few old timers who remember Solomon's temple before it was burned to the ground by the Babylonians. The old timers probably said, "You call this a temple! I'll tell you what a real temple looks like as I saw it myself as a young man."
 - e) The point here is I could see a lot of people being discouraged by the temple. I'm sure the rest of the people moving there the Babylon Empire saw other magnificent, huge temples built to their false gods. It was necessary for Haggai to give a speech to encourage them to say that in spite of this temple's lack of splendor, God's happy with the work.
14. Verse 4: But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD. `Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the LORD, `and work. For I am with you,' declares the LORD Almighty. ⁵ `This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.'
- a) I have to admit, I always like people who encourage others. I like seeing movies that have a message of encouragement. One thing I suspect most of us fail to pray for enough is for us to have "boldness". When the Christian church got started in the early chapters of Acts, you can read of the church praying for boldness. That term is used four times in Chapter Four of Acts. I have to be careful here. It's not just "sucking it up" and having the guts to go forwards. It's asking God to give us the boldness to make a difference for God when it is tough to do so.
 - b) I state that here, as that's what I see Haggai doing. He's telling both the civil leader as well as well as the spiritual leader to be strong. Verse 5 then states the power source of how to be strong: It says, "My (God's) Spirit remains among you, do not fear".
 - i) That means that God gives us the power to do whatever is His will. When we have that New Beginning in life or in a project, He promises that He will provide for us the power to do that will.
 - ii) Let's be honest: Shyness is a lot safer than boldness. Nobody wants others to hate us. We naturally fear being criticized or put down by others. Having boldness is to get past those fears and use our life for something good. To make a difference for the God who created us. Does that mean if we're doing His will, nothing will go wrong? Of course not. A big part of making a difference for God involves trial and error. It also involves spiritual resistance. One way to know if you are really making a difference for God is "stuff happens". Spiritual resistance is a part of life when we're doing His will. However, God promises us that His power is greater than any and all forces to do His will.
 - c) That little speech leads us back to boldness. It doesn't mean "suck it up and trust God". It means that we can have the boldness to make a difference for Him when we're relying on His power to do so. It does not mean life will be perfect. It doesn't mean all our problems will instantly go away. It means that He promises to provide for us as individuals and as a collective body all the power we need to go make a difference for Him.
 - d) Bottom line, want to make a difference for God? Pray for His boldness to do so.

- e) That little lecture leads us back to this verse. Notice Haggai declares that God's spirit did go with the Israelites when they left Egypt. They made the mistake of getting their focus on their fears, which was the whole "40 years wandering in the desert" issue. My point is when we accept Jesus as being both God and fully in charge of our lives, as a bonus all of us Christians get His Spirit to guide us through life. He promises never to forsake us and never, means never. Consider what He wants from us: A relationship with us all through out our lives. He wants us to chose to do His will. What we tend to forget is that He also provides us with the power to do His will. That's why when we pray, we should not only ask that His will be done, but that we have the boldness to do so. Essentially that is what these verses are talking about.
15. Verse 6: "This is what the LORD Almighty says: `In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.⁷ I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty.⁸ `The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty.⁹ `The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. `And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty."
- a) Remember what the "project" is that God wants the Israelites to perform: Build a temple. Here Haggai gets all "end times" on them. Let's face it, whatever it is Haggai is describing here, it hasn't literally happened yet. Has a day come when God's temple is the center of the entire world? Has the entire world been shaken by God showing up in Israel? Has all the gold and silver of the world come to that temple? Even more important that all of that has the peace of knowing God come to the whole world?
- i) Obviously, the answer is no. The big question of course is why is Haggai going all "end times" on us here and now? Haggai's purpose was to encourage the Israelites to rebuild the temple. The "old timer's" who've seen Solomon's Temple before that was destroyed were probably thinking, "You call this a temple?" Haggai's response was essentially to say God's going to rule the world from this temple spot one day. So don't worry about what it looks like in comparison to the last one.
- ii) I said in my introduction that this temple eventually got destroyed. By the time of King Herod in the Roman era, he rebuilt this temple from the foundation up. That one was destroyed by the Romans in 70AD. My point is how can Haggai as God's prophet give this, "God's going to occupy this place" lecture when we known from history it got destroyed, rebuilt, destroyed again and hasn't existed for about 2,000 years? What's the deal? Glad you asked!
- iii) God promises us that when we make Him the center of our lives, He will bless us with good things. It doesn't mean every devout Christian will be rich and famous if we trust in Him. It means God will lead us to provide for our needs if we'll put Him as the center of our lives. For those Israelites to make God the center of their lives, it meant having a temple built in order to offer the sacrifices which show us how Jesus paid the full price for our sins. For us, making God our center focus is all about praying to Him daily, trusting Him to guide our lives, realizing that none of us Christians have to prove our worth to Him. It should be our goal to make a difference for Him with our lives. That's the "temple" we build with our lives.
- iv) Of course, God never intends us to be "one billion solo acts for Jesus". He wants us to work together to make a difference for Him. That's why we form communities not only to worship God, but also to encourage each other and help each other to draw closer to Him.
- b) All of that leads us back to the end times "millennial" talk. Yes Jesus will return one day. Yes a temple will exist in that day as the nations honor Him as God. Of course, all of that "horrid" stuff has to happen first, but there will be a future temple one day as described in these verses as well as many other places in the bible. Let me explain that a little better:

- i) While there are multitudes of Christians, the majority of the world does not want Jesus as King. Muslims consider Jesus a great prophet, but not God. Other major religions in the world ignore any aspect of Judaism or Christianity. They deny the idea of a single Messiah figure literally ruling over the world.
 - ii) If that's the case, will there be a day like Haggai describes in these verses? Yes, it'll happen whether those nations like it or not. The bible has thousands of predictions most of which have already come true. If we can trust God's word about all those predictions about Jesus First Coming, then we should also trust His word when it comes to the issue of His Second Coming. One reason Revelation describes all that "war stuff" is most of the world does not want a Jewish Messiah to rule over them. Unfortunately all that war is going to be necessary so that the "millennial" stuff can begin. By God warning us millenniums in advance of all that destruction, we will not be surprised when it occurs and we'll recognize it when it happens.
 - iii) This surprisingly leads me back to Haggai. His "new beginning" involves starting a project for God. Once we dedicate our lives back to being God centered, expect Him to bless us in ways we can't imagine. Haggai never says "God's coming back tomorrow" to do all of this. He never even promises it's "that" temple which will be the basis of that work. He's promising that if we make God our central focus, a day will come where the Messiah will rule the world from Israel. His "home" will be where that temple stood at one time and will stand again one day.
 - iv) If all of that is true, why aren't the Israelites rebuilding the temple today? Part of the answer is most of the people living in that land today are non-religious. If the people who are devout believers start building on the spot they believe where the old one stood, it'd start World War Three, as Muslims consider that spot sacred. As of today, there's a "stalemate" on construction of that temple.
 - v) Besides that, we can't speed up God's timing. We can't build that building as if to say to God, "Here it is, let's get the show on the road!" Jesus will return when He will return and we can't change that timing. Besides that, Revelation tells us that the next temple built will be desecrated by the antichrist, so I don't think that is the temple that Jesus will rule from one day. The point for us is we're to make God the center focus of our lives and let Him worry about when the "show" starts.
 - vi) Meanwhile, Haggai's not done talking, so let's get back to His visions.
16. Verse 10: On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Haggai: ¹¹ "This is what the LORD Almighty says: `Ask the priests what the law says: ¹² If a person carries consecrated meat in the fold of his garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, oil or other food, does it become consecrated?' " The priests answered, "No." ¹³ Then Haggai said, "If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled?" "Yes," the priests replied, "it becomes defiled."
- a) If Haggai wasn't strange enough so far, he really jumps off the deep end here in these few verses. Essentially Haggai is setting up his audience by reminding them what is and what is not "holy" to God. Let me paraphrase these verses as that may help. If one has a cup of water mixed with dirt and another cup of water that's drinkable, what will happen when we mix those two cups full of water together, will it be clean or dirty? Obviously, it will be dirty. That's the effective point of both illustrations. He explains why he's giving these illustrations in Verse 14, but we're not there yet.
 - b) With that understood, let me explain this a little better. In both Judaism and Christianity there's a concept called "holiness". It's the idea of setting something apart for God's use. I like the illustration of having a dinner plate that only a certain guest can use. Holiness is like that, as it's about separating things for God's use. Jewish priests were trained so food that was dedicated to temple use (sacrificed) can't be mixed with other stuff.

- c) It's the idea that the food set apart for God is "holy". It doesn't mean God needs food. It's a way to illustrate to us that God's "above all things". It's a way to illustrate how God can not tolerate any sin whatsoever. Books like Leviticus are filled with rituals to demonstrate how God is "above it all" and the rituals to honor God are designed to show us of how He is "holy". By separating things for God's use and avoiding "contaminating" them with the things that are not for His use, it's designed to show us how God's "above all things".
 - i) Were there practical benefits to all of this? Sure. The whole world of germs were not discovered until the last few centuries. Jewish washing rituals spared most of the Jewish population from the plagues that wiped out much of Europe when the "great plague" ran through that area in the Middle Ages.
 - ii) However, the main reason for all these separating "clean and unclean" things was designed to illustrate God's holiness.
 - d) Ok, now that we've beaten to death the idea that God is "holy" and above contamination, let's see what's Haggai's point is for bringing this up.
17. Verse 14: Then Haggai said, " `So it is with this people and this nation in my sight,' declares the LORD. `Whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled.
- a) The concept of separating things for God's use, doesn't end with Him. We too are part of that idea of "holiness" and being separated for God's use. The concept of a new beginning means we too are now separated for God's use. It doesn't mean all of us Christians have to quit our day jobs to become professional priests. It doesn't mean that we Christians can't do anything that's "non-religious". It means we honor God as why we've been separated for His use. Just as God's "above all sin", so God desires His people to be "Holy" as well. It doesn't mean we're sin free. It means we're to avoid sin as much as possible. To commit sin harms our own lives and takes away the joy that God wants us to have.
 - b) Bottom line, if we claim Jesus is God, if we trust in His payment for the complete payment for our sins, the next issue is what have we done about it? Have we "separated ourselves" for His use? Have we become "holy" so that God can use us? Does that mean I have to be "sin free" to be used by God? Of course not. However, if we're going to be a good witness for Him, that means we willfully turn from sin to make a difference for Him.
 - c) Let me put it another way: As a Christian, I'm free to drink all the alcohol and take all the bad drugs I want. The question is, "How much do I want to?" If God has separated us for His use, why would I want to take away that joy and not live as He desires? Again it's not about being perfect. It is about realizing God's in charge of our lives and it should be our desire to please Him with our lives. That means making the effort to live as He desires. It is not to earn His love, but strictly out of gratitude for what He's done for us.
 - d) With that said, let's get back to Haggai. His point is the Israelites living there at that time were "defiled" like my dirty water illustration. Because they were not focused on building the temple and making God the center focus of their lives, God can't bless them if they or us do not make Him the central focus of their lives.
 - e) So does that mean we can only have financial success, fame or power if God is the central focus of our lives? Obviously many people achieve those things without making God the central focus of their lives. The issue is those things all by themselves are never enough. To have peace in our hearts, we need to turn our lives over to Him. Then He promises us peace through whatever we're dealing with in life at any given time. That promise of joy is far greater and is eternal versus whatever it is this world has to offer.
 - f) To illustrate this principal, Haggai finishes his book by reminding the Israelites of the fact they lacked God's blessing in their lives because they failed to build that temple. Once we are separated for God's use, the "problem" is we become God's problem. We realize that if He's not the central focus of our lives, we become miserable as we have this built in desire to please Him with every aspect of our lives. The Israelites back then we're trying to make it in life without Him, and as we'll read, they were failing miserably.

18. Verse 15: " `Now give careful thought to this from this day on--consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the LORD's temple. ¹⁶ When anyone came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When anyone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were only twenty. ¹⁷ I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not turn to me,' declares the LORD. ¹⁸ `From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid. Give careful thought: ¹⁹ Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit. " `From this day on I will bless you.' "
- a) Now that we're approaching the end of the book, Haggai is still encouraging the Israelites by saying, "Think back to life before we started building this temple". Remember before this project started and all the things that went wrong in life. Why do you think that is?"
 - b) Does this mean when life isn't going well, the problem is always a lack of a relationship in our prayer life? Of course not. When things are going wrong, I think of it as a "checklist". The first thing to consider is my relationship with God. Am I living as He desires? Should I be aware of some sin I should confess? All I'm saying is before we start to tackle an issue we're facing, start with our relationship with God. Ask Him to make it obvious if there is an issue to be aware of. Ask God to guide us through whatever we're dealing with at this moment. My favorite illustration on this point is God never promises us riches or fame or power if we trust Him. He promises to "throw us a rope" to pull us through a situation if it is His will for us to get through it. A good prayer in tough times is to ask God to make it obvious what it is He wants us to learn from that situation.
 - c) Let's be honest, when things go wrong, we don't get our own Haggai to tell us the reason things aren't going well is because we're ignoring God's will. That's because God wants us to seek Him and pray for His guidance through our situations. It helps to have friends in our lives who will encourage us to do the right thing and having the boldness to move on and do what's right. That's why Haggai was sent to the Israelites to encourage them!
 - d) Anyway, the key point of these verses is that God promises to bless our lives if we make Him the central focus of our lives. That's Haggai's point and Jesus' point in Matthew 6:33 as well. So what does blessing mean? If it's not riches, fame or power, what does Haggai mean by God's blessing? First, it's the assurance of salvation based on trusting Him as the central focus of our lives. It means He promises to help us through our lives if we let Him be that central focus. It means peace in our lives no matter what we are facing. It means a life full of joy through both the good and difficult times of our lives. I don't speak for any of you reading this, but that seems like a pretty good blessing to Me.
 - e) In the meantime, God's still got one more messages to Haggai to proclaim:
19. Verse 20: The word of the LORD came to Haggai a second time on the twenty-fourth day of the month: ²¹ "Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I will shake the heavens and the earth. ²² I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother.
- a) What's implied in this final message is that the governor (civil leader) Zerubbabel wasn't present at this message. It's as if Haggai is just speaking to the crowd or other officials. It is a message that God promises to be greater in power than all the kings of this world. It's a promise that the world as they know it will end with foreign powers ruling over them.
 - b) Remember that the Persian Emperor appointed Zerubbabel as their leader. The message to him was effectively, "Remember who's really in charge around here. That empire you are representing is in effect nothing and will not last forever.
 - c) As I like to state every so often, prophecy is "patterns" not just predictions. All I'm saying is there was a short-term and long-term prediction being made here. The "short term" one is that the Persians will "fall" in a relatively short term time after Haggai wrote this. Haggai is in effect predicting the rise of the Greek Empire that overthrew the Persians. He is also obviously making a long term prediction that God will Himself rule one day.

- d) Let me talk about this a little more. We have the advantage of seeing history unfold over the last few thousand millennia. Empires have come and gone, and people like us are still waiting for the Messiah to come rule over the world. Wouldn't the first question we'd ask be, "Why did you take so long?" The answer is if He came 100 years ago, we wouldn't have the privilege of being a part of it. The answer is, God's gathering as many people as He desires to spend eternity with. The world as we know it, can't go on forever. The sun has to burn out one day. My point is that heaven has to have some unknown fixed number of people. When God chooses to wrap it up, is His business, not ours. Our job as Christians is to be a witness for Him. That's what the Great Commission is all about.
 - e) What I'm getting at is the bible's full of predictions about Jesus returning to rule over all of the world one day. Until that day comes, God's calling us to use our lives as a witness for Him. That's what a New Beginning is all about. As to the specific's of what God wants us to do, that's why we pray for His guidance and read His word, to discern what He desires of us as living witnesses for Him.
 - f) Anyway, that's Haggai's message to those Israelites as well as a big part of God's message to us as Christians. With that said, one more verse to go.
20. Verse 23: " `On that day,' declares the LORD Almighty, `I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,' declares the LORD, `and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,' declares the LORD Almighty."
- a) Remember that Zerubbabel isn't the latest high priest, but Israel's civil leader at that time. So why end Haggai's book by praising him? Neither the bible nor history says anything that is historically special about Zerubbabel, other than the fact he was the leader over the Israelites living there at that time.
 - b) To explain, let me give a little background on Zerubbabel's name. His name means born of Babylon. It's a reference to the fact he was born in the Babylonian Empire and now in the era of the Persian Empire, he's the leader of the Israelites back in Israel.
 - i) OK, that's neat. What's the big deal? Just as the Israelites were taken in captivity by the Babylonians, so God brought them back to Israel. By having a statement of the fact that God said he's like "my signet ring", it's a way of saying God's chosen this guy to lead the Israelites back in their homeland again.
 - c) One more time, why should we care? Just as God picked this guy to lead the Israelites out of captivity and back to their homeland, so God wants to lead us Christians through Jesus into a rich life of trusting Him to guide our lives. That's what the New Beginning is, a rich and full life of trusting God for every aspect of our lives. If you get that, you get why this book was written in the first place.
 - d) With that said, I thank you for reading and I'll wrap this up in prayer.
21. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, we thank You for the New Beginning You've given each of us. Yes we mess up a lot. It's a waste of time to question why You've picked us, so help us to accept the fact You have. Help us to remember that we can't change our past, but just learn from it so we can use what time we have left to make a difference for You. We pray for Your boldness so that we use our time for Your glory. May today be a wonderfully blessed day as we trust You'll use it as You desire. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.