



## Who's Got the Gold?

Sunday, November 9, 2025

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### Old Testament Lesson, Haggai 2:1-9

In the second year of King Darius, <sup>1</sup> in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai, saying: <sup>2</sup>“Speak now to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, and say: <sup>3</sup>Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? <sup>4</sup>Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, <sup>5</sup> according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit abides among you; do not fear. <sup>6</sup>For thus says the Lord of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land, <sup>7</sup> and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the Lord of hosts. <sup>8</sup> The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts. <sup>9</sup> The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts, and in this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts.”

### Sermon, “Who’s Got the Gold?”

I came to faith in the early 1970s. That was a time of revival in our land. Churches were growing. Churches were being planted. Churches were hiring staff and church budgets were growing. And men and women were answering the call into the ministry. Consequently, there were more pastors than churches.

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Things have changed in the church today. I don't mean our church; I mean the church as a whole. Last year at the Illinois Great River Annual Conference, our conference trustees announced that fourteen churches had closed. And that's been a pretty typical number over the past few years. And we haven't planted any new churches. Like many denominations, the United Methodist Church is in a downward trend.

The prophet Haggai was no stranger to the difficulties surrounding organized religion. As a prophet, Haggai conducted his preaching in Jerusalem. His prophecy is short. Squeezed in between the books of Zephaniah and Zechariah, Haggai's book is only 38 verses long. But his message is clear: Put God First. And according to Haggai, the way to put God first was to **Build God's house**.

Haggai takes no time to preach the themes proclaimed by other prophets. His message has none of the elements so characteristic of the other biblical prophets of his day. Haggai writes no diatribe against idolatry. He says nothing of social ills or abuses of the legal system. Nor does he preach against adultery or [blending Jewish beliefs with those of surrounding religions]. His one and only theme was rebuilding God's temple.<sup>1</sup>

It had been some 66 years since Babylon had conquered Judah and destroyed the temple. Initially, some false prophets proclaimed to the refugees that they would return in just a year or two, but Jeremiah rebuked that claim. True, some of the refugees were allowed to return to Jerusalem, but they had to wait half a century for that to become a reality.

Haggai was one of those lower-class Hebrews who was left behind in Israel. He likely lived among the ruins until the first exiles returned from Babylon. No doubt Haggai rejoiced when they began to rebuild their beloved Jerusalem; their progress is recorded in the Book of Ezra.

But that was 18 years ago, and in the years since, Haggai chapter 1 tells us that the Hebrews rebuilt their homes, but they failed to rebuild the temple. The Hebrew refugees who returned to Israel were keen on rebuilding their own homes and their own lives, but they were lackluster when it came to rebuilding the temple. Chapter 1 testifies to the fact that their homes were repaired, but the temple was still in ruins.

Consequently, the Lord had a message for the returning exiles, and he delivers it through Haggai. Twice he declares, **"Give careful thought to your ways."**

He observed that the people planted much but harvested little. And when it came to food, drink, or clothes, they were never satisfied. The reason, Haggai said, is that they were not generous toward God. So Haggai commands them, "Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I (the Lord) may take pleasure in it and be honored" (1:8).

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Alden, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7: *Haggai*. Pg. 573.

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Haggai wants the people to know that they needed to make God a priority in their lives, and the way to make God a priority was to build God's house. And that would require an investment of time, energy, and finances.

The prophet isn't trying to lay a guilt trip on the people. And there was nothing for him personally to gain in calling the people to build God's house. Instead, the tone of chapter 1 is to call the people to examine themselves.

It's November. We've just launched our annual Share the Harvest campaign. Like the temple of Haggai's time, we are in need. We're certainly not in ruins, but we do have our needs. You may be asking yourself, *Why should I invest in this church? Why should anyone invest in this ministry?* The reasons are many.

First, we have a mission to connect people to Jesus Christ. And when we give, we invest in that mission.

The reality is that in this modern era, it takes money for us to fulfill our mission. It takes money to keep the freezers freezing and that means we must pay our utility bill every month so that our Caring Hearts ministry can continue to feed our neighbors.

It takes money to pay for our property insurance because in 2025 America, insurance isn't a luxury. There's nothing glamorous about paying our insurance bill, but it is a necessity.

It takes money to pay our conference apportionments because we recognize that we are part of something that is much bigger than us. Our conference not only helps us to maintain accountability for our ministry, it also connects people to Jesus Christ more effectively than we would be able to do by ourselves. So we are mindful to pay our denominational overhead.

A second reason why we should support this ministry is because we strive to honor God, and one of the ways we do that is by being good stewards of our assets. And our most important asset is our building. It's not as elaborate as St. Peter's Basilica in Rome or Notre Dame Cathedral of Paris, but this is a beautiful church with an even more beautiful sanctuary, and I believe our facilities honor our Triune God. And God bless all of you who have helped us to update and maintain our church building.

A third reason why we should give to this ministry is because we need to give more than our church needs to receive your gifts. What I mean by that is that God calls us to a life of generosity. If we never learn to give away a portion of our possessions, we become selfish; we become self-indulgent. We might even become narcissistic.

Someone once said that there are two kinds of people in the world: there are givers. And there are takers. I realize that many of us are facing hardships because of the economic realities of our times. Prices are going up. SNAP benefits have been in the crosshairs of some of our politicians. There's not a week that goes by that I don't have someone call the church looking for financial assistance. But even if you are on the verge of being labeled a taker, you can still find ways to give.

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There was a time in my life when I could not afford to give to my church as much as I wanted to give. But I wanted to be a giver. So I began the practice of donating blood. Today, I'm able to pay my tithes to this church, but I continue the practice of donating blood several times a year.

Haggai wants us to live in generosity, and it begins by being generous toward God. So we give to the work of God by supporting his church. And as we give, God is glorified.

And that's where Haggai chapter 2 really comes into focus. A few of the Jewish exiles returning to Jerusalem remembered the glory of Solomon's temple. But thanks to the destruction of the Babylonian armies, now all they saw was a shambles. Haggai declares that even though what you see now is in ruins, God's glory will be restored to this place. No doubt those same people with the long memories said, "How is that possible? How will God's glory ever be restored to this place?" And Haggai responds, "All it takes is for you to be strong and work. And remember that I am with you" (2:4).

"But it's going to cost a lot of shekels to rebuild the temple."

"...thus says the Lord of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land, and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with splendor," says the Lord of hosts."

The time is coming when God will shake things up, and when that happens, God's house will be filled. And when that happens, we will connect people to Jesus Christ like never before. And then God goes on to say, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine," says the Lord of hosts.

**The silver is mine, and the gold is mine.**

We forget that everything that we have has been entrusted to us by God. Whether you're John Q. Public or Elon Musk, you are merely a steward of all the money in your wallet or in your Wall Street portfolio. Last week I quoted James 1:17, and it rings true again this week:

Every good and every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights. Parents, when you give gifts to your children, whether they're 5 years old, 15 years old, or 45 years old, you want them to be good stewards of that gift and use it in the way it was intended.

In the same way, God our Father gives us good gifts, whether they are our salaries, payouts from our pension funds, proceeds from the sales of our crops, Social Security benefits, or TANF or AFDC benefits, God calls us to be good steward of those gifts from above.

Are we being good stewards of all that has been entrusted to us?