

FEBRUARY 8, 2026

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

BIBLE STUDY

Haggai 2

The second chapter of Haggai is also the last. It continues on from the criticism and calling of Chapter 1. The people who had remained behind during the Babylonian exile, as well as the ones who had returned from exile were under a similar critique. They had done well focusing on their own homes, comfort and so forth. Unfortunately they hadn't sought to rebuild the Temple which had been defiled and destroyed decades prior. God was displeased. Through Haggai God called on Zerubbabel and Joshua to lead the people in rebuilding God's house.

The people responded positively. This chapter carries on this ongoing process.

The first portion addresses people who apparently had some knowledge of the Temple's former glory. There were some who weren't fully on board with Haggai's call. God's response was to remind them of what they already knew was possible because they had seen it. As these people are pulled up, God assures Zerubbabel and Joshua that God is with them in their action. If they will lead, and the people will follow, there is no need for fear and the Temple will be rebuilt.

God reminds them that in the future all the present systems will be rattled and Judah will once again be powerful and peaceful. The treasures that once graced the Temple will be restored along with its glory.

This is a very good and present calling for our modern church today. There are many who decades ago saw thriving, burgeoning congregations and now lament shrinking attendance in worship and a diminishing congregational body. They talk about "the good ol' days" and wish their return. The calling now is the same as the calling then.

If we see the house of God, the communities of faith, struggling and we know what is possible we have a job to do. More than grousing, more than nostalgia there is a responsibility of action. How do we motivate a newer generation to value and cherish the community and joy of what we know is possible? How do we inspire and encourage those among and around us to be consistently and energetically involved in a congregation? Everyone might have a different calling as to what to do, however we are all called to do something if we want to be obedient and ensure that a gospel that has integrity is passed along.

Then there is this interesting sense of defiling. Keep in mind that in those times the structure of the Temple was held in much more esteem than our structures today. Today we see the church as the people. Not the building. So long as the community is faithful, the worship is worthy. So long as the community has a heart that serves and loves, the worship and relationship with God is strong and good.

In Haggai's time this was different. The Temple held very real significance. That's kind of the point of the whole book. Not restoring the temple is what had the people in bad standing with God. Their inattentiveness was faithlessness, sin, and brought God's punishment. They needed to get the Temple back in good repair.

When the Babylonians came through and destroyed it, they defiled it. Because of this, anything done in or at the Temple was unworthy. If they sacrificed on a desecrated altar those sacrifices were not acceptable. If the altar is defiled so is everything on it.

Similarly, it was their works or lack thereof that was also defiling. Something made holy can't impart its holiness because the object in and of itself is a symbol. What makes something holy is the intention, faith, and genuineness behind it. In other words, it's our relationship with God and the right acting in our lives that makes our offerings holy and sacred. Otherwise they are just materials and objects with no holy significance.

The reminder of the lacking resources wasn't a condemnation of their present attitude. It was a then and now kind of sensibility. Then, before they did anything about the Temple, they were in want and need. NOW, since they had begun work on repairing the Temple, God will bless them.

The past is just that, the past. It is helpful to remember so we don't repeat the same mistakes. Living there is the danger. Living in the past is where regret and beating ourselves up also live. Learning from it, doing better and celebrating that growth is where life moves forward and becomes more peaceful, productive, and prosperous.

Verse 18 mentions thinking of the day the foundation of the temple was laid. This was the beginning of their turnaround and a day to remember and celebrate.

Finally there is Zerubbabel being declared God's "signet ring". Earlier in Jeremiah, Jehoiachin was prophesied against. The term was that the signet was "torn from God's right hand". The wickedness of the king and following kings removed God's blessing of authority. That is the signet, a sign of royal authority.

Saul had a similar issue because of his disobedience. God's favor was removed from him and passed to David. Here Zerubbabel is restoring a sense of God's authority in the governance of God's people. He isn't a king, he is a governor. Even so he is in the line of David. He has been chosen to rebuild the temple, that is the authority God has granted him. It would seem Zerubbabel has accepted this task and authority. After 70 years of exile, the people are rebuilding God's holy city and God's holy temple.

It's easy to lament when we see things not the way they are supposed to be. When this happens we have to ask where we stand. Will we be like the people before Haggai's call? Will we simply look out for ourselves and let God's work and calling be a distant priority? Or will we hear Haggai in our own present day? Will we see where work needs done and not wait until the midnight hour? Will we hear God's calling in our hearts, bind together as a community, and be about the business of Christ? This is how the church reaffirms its footing as a place of authentic worship, genuine grace and love, and claims the true mantle of our redeeming Savior Jesus Christ.