

**SERMON BY REV W HUIZINGA
FOR THANKSGIVING AND
PRAYER SERVICE FOR CROPS AND LABOUR

ON HAGGAI 1**

LITURGY - morning

Votum and Salutation	Psalm 65:1,4
The Ten Words of the Covenant	Psalm 65:2,3
Prayer for the Opening of God's Word	
Thankoffering	Psalm 67:1,2,3
Read	Haggai 1
Text	Haggai 1
Theme and points of sermon	

**SHOW YOUR THANKS
BY BUILDING THE HOUSE OF GOD!**

- 1. *No thanks to God yields poverty.***
- 2. *Much thanks to God yields blessings.***

Response to sermon	Hymn 57:1,2,4
Pastoral Prayer	Psalm 65:5,6
Benediction	

Points to Ponder

1. Why do we combine Thanksgiving with prayer for a new season of labour?
2. What did you learn about the historical situation of Judah to whom Haggai delivers this first message?
3. Why does God make such a big deal of his house? Is it not only a building? Explain.
4. Why do we refer to a church-building as God's house? Is this correct according to the NT?
5. How can we neglect God's house?
6. Lord's Day 38 teaches we must maintain the ministry of the Word. Do your contributions for this ministry reflect generous thanks or not?
7. Explain how Jesus fulfils the house of the Lord.
8. How do your contributions invest for the coming future of glory of God's house?

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving Day!

I remember the front patios around the front doors decorated with stalks of corn, with piles of pumpkins and squash, as symbols of thankfulness for the harvests.

Everywhere on the fields the threshing machines busily harvested the feed corn and soy beans as well as wheat. At the same time the tractors pulled ploughs to work the land so that a winter crop of grains could be sown and could grow before the winter frosts set in.

Yes, one harvest comes and another season starts. This is certainly true here in Australia where multiple crops in one year from the same field are very possible. It changes for different areas. Australia is so diverse in climate and soils. In WA they harvest a crop of canola while in Tassie they plough the fields for a new crop. No wonder our forefathers decided to combine a thanksgiving service with a prayer service for the crops and for our labours.

We always hope for a bumper crop, for a year of lots of work with a good paycheque. Everyone does.

What makes you different as a Christian? What do you aim for? What is your goal in 2010.

Our theme for home-visits this year is – be living members of a vibrant church. Does being a living member have much to do with being thankful and also acknowledging the Lord? Yes, very much! In fact this is the very reason we have turned to Haggai 1.

I preach to you the Word of God from the prophet Haggai under this THEME:

SHOW YOUR THANKS BY BUILDING THE HOUSE OF GOD!

- 1. No thanks to God yields poverty.***
- 2. Much thanks to God yields blessings.***

1. No thanks yields poverty

Haggai prophesied after the people of Israel returned from the Babylonian exile. He was the first prophet to rise up in the midst of Judah after the captivity. Between Zephaniah (the Bible book which comes before Haggai) and Haggai there are the 70 years of captivity. All the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel about the years of banishment and about the return to their homeland have come true.

During the reign of King Cyrus Babylon fell. Then King Cyrus grants permission for the Jews to return, as you can read in Ezra 1. About 50,000 people return home, return home to the Lord as well. Zerubbabel the royal prince and Joshua the high-priest lead the way. Immediately the altar of burnt-offering was erected, so they could sacrifice and show thanks to the Lord. They then prepared to rebuild the temple, laying a foundation in the second year of their return. Quite some zeal!

But problems arose. Their neighbours, the Samaritans, wanted to help. Owing to the mixed religion of these imported people, the Jews turned this offer down. In retaliation the Samaritans made life hard for the Jews. They plotted with other neighbouring nations (Ezra 4:4-5):

Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

King Cyrus never revoked his decree to allow them to rebuild the house of God. But the king after him did do so. This was 12 years after they laid the foundation for the temple. So the work remained dormant for many a year. The enemies, with the Devil stirring them on, succeeded in making the hands of the Jews idle. Lack of faith, fear of the enemy, and self-interest made them focus on their own homes, leaving the house of God in ruins.

Lack of zeal, lack of trust and lack of thankfulness for their delivery from exile made them give up this work. If faith drove them, if thanks welled up in their hearts, then the Lord would have remained with them to bless them.

Haggai makes it clear that their own indifference, not historical circumstances like opposition, stopped the work on God's house.

Haggai's chief task from the Lord consisted of calling the people to rebuild the temple. It was now 16 years after their return from exile. The year is 520 BC. It is time to get to work. On the first day of the sixth month Haggai delivers his first message, his first prophecy.

Is this date so important? Why the first day? Sure it is nice to have an historical foundation for this prophecy, but is there more to it? Yes! On the first day of the month, the new moon, special sacrifices were offered:

"On the first of every month, present to the LORD a burnt offering of two young bulls, one ram and seven male lambs a year old, all without defect. With each bull there is to be a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil; with the ram, a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil; and with each lamb, a grain offering of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil. This is for a burnt offering, a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the LORD by fire (Numbers 28:11-13).

So a meeting at God's house took place on this very day. Haggai enjoyed a ready audience. Everyone could also see the temple still lying in ruins. So while they offered 2 bulls, one ram and 7 male lambs as well as the grain offering of thanks to the Lord, they witnessed the sad neglect of God's house.

Haggai calls them, urges them, commands them to build the house of God.

First Haggai confronts the two God-given leaders, Zerubbabel the royal prince and Joshua the high-priest.

These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.

Note how God calls them *these people* and not *my people*. God takes distance from their unthankful attitude. Haggai accuses them of lack of concern for building God's house. His house lay desolate. This was the problem in a nutshell. Meanwhile the people concern themselves with their own affairs, their own homes and projects.

Oh yes, in the first year they rejoiced in God's wonderful deliverance. God moved the heart of the mighty King Cyrus so they could return home. Amazing! What a dream! God's blessing returns to them. They out of faith, thanks and love set up the altar of God and lay a foundation for God's house. But how quickly a little opposition cooled their enthusiasm.

Sure the people have excuses. Their crops failed miserably in the past years. We too may have lean years. Last year the economic downturn meant many of you lived with lower incomes and less work. It happens.

Disasters hit them. Under the successor of Cyrus, Cambyses, the army of Persia plundered Judah while marching on Egypt. Neighbours troubled them. Other religions and gods crept in to weaken their love of God and obedience to his commands. No financial help came from Persia. *So how could you start, they complained?* They did not have much for their own families in the first years. Certainly you have to take care of your family!

On and on went the excuses. Enemies! Advisers gave stern warnings!

The time was not ripe.

Indeed, they formed a small community. Only a few, a remnant, returned home, home to the Lord.

So God's house would have to wait, wait even more years before completion.

Then Haggai stands up to deliver God's message:

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

Panelled means that the inside walls were covered or inlaid with costly wood work. It was a sign of luxury. If you have costly homes, why is this house of God still lying in a pile of rubble.

Then Haggai explains why the people experienced hard times, droughts and bad crops. The people of Judah claimed that times are hard, too hard. We cannot build the house of God now.

Haggai, or should I say the Lord, turns this around and says, *you do not build my house and therefore times are hard for you.* Judah's neglect made life hard, made Thanksgiving Day into a time of complaining - *times are poor; crops are poor and no matter how hard we work, we just keep going backwards.*

Why? God brings curses down on them. Instead of his blessings, God increases their poverty. God opposes them.

Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!" "You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes." Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!"

At seedtime you sowed all your fields. What a lot of work in walking behind the yoke of oxen who pull the plough! Under a hot sun they sweated long and hard to put as much seed into the ground as possible. But did it yield a good harvest, maybe a bumper crop? No! The harvests amounted to little. They hardly had enough seed for the next season, let alone enough grain for the family and for the livestock. Meagre yields!

Around the table mother puts food on the table for the family but no one is really filled, satisfied. Water is rationed because there is little rain. Fields, animals and people all suffer when the seasonal rains stay away.

This never happens by chance. You cannot say it is just seasonal and maybe next year will be better. God regulates this drought in Israel, even as God rules the droughts, the floods and cyclones here in Australia.

Curses replace blessings. *You shall bring out much seed to the field, but you shall gather in little, reads one of the curses of the covenant (Deut 28:38).* Disobedience, lack of love for God's house, will bring disasters (Leviticus 26:19):

I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze.

In verses 10+11 we read that this very thing happened. The sky turned to iron – not yielding a drop of rain. The ground caked and cracked. Whenever clouds

did come, promising a downpour, no rain or only a light sprinkle came down, not even enough to keep the dust down. They must have broken their backs on bone-dry soil. God had rightly warned:

And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit (Leviticus 26:20).

No olives for salads, and no olive oil for baking or for lights. No grapes for delicious juice and no wine to make their hearts glad.

They put on clothing but when the weather turned cold they still shivered. The labourer works hard but finds that his salary soon disappears. His pockets have holes. His wallet has holes. Expenses mounted. Income did not keep up with expenses. Frustrating! The LORD blew the salary away. This did not just happen but the Lord ruled it. God wanted to teach them a lesson.

Yet they do not learn by hard experience. No, God has to send his prophet to them before they start to learn why poverty, bad crops, meagre harvests and empty wallets plague them.

Why has all this occurred? Can you blame it on the bad weather, on bad neighbours, poor equipment with all elements against you? The Lord's prophet makes it crystal clear –

you have left my house in ruins. You refuse to lift a finger to finish my house. This is why you suffer set-backs. I am against you. Meanwhile you scurry about to beautify your own homes, inlaying precious woods into your walls. All the while my glory resides in rubble.

Consider your ways!

What about you? Does the LORD need to deliver a sermon on the subject before you understand why you get nowhere, but only keep on back-peddalling? *Money cannot buy happiness, but it sure helps!* Ever heard that saying?

So God's curses multiplied. Disappointment followed disappointment. Season after season during that 16 year period!

Consider your ways! Take to heart the outcome of your ways. See how you make no progress, God says.

"You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the LORD of hosts. "Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. "Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. "For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands."

How do you apply this to yourselves? What does it mean to you?

God's house today is the church, the temple in which God the Holy Spirit dwells. To build the church you need to live by faith, by trust in the living God, by love and thanks. You want to see the temple of God expand in this world. That means you need to support the preaching of the gospel at home and also on mission fields whether in home mission fields or foreign mission fields.

We have the great privilege to take part in this work, at home in the church, via radio and other means, and also in Lae, PNG. At present we wish to call a third missionary. The consistory with the cooperating and supporting churches approved this project last year. We called a candidate but he declined the call. Now the mission executive has presented a report and recommended we call a minister for mission work. You will receive a paper from the consistory about this. Such a person could help preach and teach the Word, allowing the church work to expand. But this is expensive. It means all of us will need to increase

our contributions substantially. Have you done so? Or do you too have excuses? You know what God said to Judah who neglected his house, his work. It is good to consider our ways on this topic on Thanksgiving Day.

2. Much thanks to God yields blessings.

But I do not wish to be wholly negative, even though over half of our text is negative. Sometimes God needs to be harsh and negative in order to prune diseased parts in his vineyard. Such pruning only helps to develop a healthy, fruitful vineyard. It is needed. You and I need it as well.

But having allowed the Lord to do his pruning, let's see what the result was in the days of Haggai. Also, ask what the positive message is for you and for me.

Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! "Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD.

Get up and build the house of the Lord! This is the positive message. The house of God or Bethel in the OT is the temple in which the LORD dwelled with his people. Here the priests offered sacrifices – peace- and thank-offerings for example, as well as sin and guilt offerings. Here they worship the LORD by means of singing and the playing of musical instruments. Here stood the ark and the altar. God lived here. God is their strength, their shield, their salvation and their song. This temple represented the focus, the center, of their life. From here came the blessings which would enrich their life. If they wish to enjoy God's blessings, let them show their love of the LORD by finishing his house. If they wanted good crops, bountiful harvests at Thanksgiving time, and want blessing over their labour in all spheres of life, let them out of love build this house as quickly and beautifully as possible.

Led by the royal prince and the high-priest the people obeyed this message from the LORD. They went to the hills and mountains to obtain wood. God indeed stirred up the hearts and spirits of leaders and people alike.

It shows that in the church of Christ good leadership will help stir up the people to obedience and to blessings.

We read how only 23 days later they started. It is hard to tell whether they started to gather wood or whether they started to use the wood in building the house of God. At any rate they started, and it did not take long for them to build the house. Oh, it would not match the glory of Solomon's temple. But then Haggai pointed them ahead to the coming glory of God's house when Jesus would come from heaven to earth to display the glory of God.

What a wonderful outcome! Almost instant results!

You and I want God's blessings as well. As we look ahead to a new season of work in various fields of labour or study we thus need God's indispensable blessing. Otherwise rising early and going to bed late at night are all in vain. If you seek God's blessing, remember to acknowledge the LORD by giving the first and the best for the LORD. Be generous with your time and money. Do not be stingy, giving only a token thanks to the LORD. Think of it as an investment for the coming of God's glorious house. You invest it for a glorious future.

Yes, for a glorious future! For the house of the LORD has a history. We have looked at its past in the OT. Then I pointed you to our Lord Jesus Christ who fulfilled the house of God by destroying the temple and rebuilding it in three days. Jesus himself is Bethel, the dwelling of God with his people.

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit who dwells with you and dwells in you as a congregation and as individual believers. The Spirit teaches you that all areas

of life are temple-areas, spheres which the Spirit claims for Jesus. All of life must become holy. Even the bells on the horses will have the inscription, *holy to the LORD*.

In that day "HOLINESS TO THE LORD" shall be engraved on the bells of the horses. The pots in the LORD's house shall be like the bowls before the altar (Zechariah 14:20).

All of life becomes as holy as in God's house. Here on this earth the Holy Spirit starts this process. But the best is still to come!

Jesus brings the new earth under new heavens where God dwells with us. All of earth becomes a huge cube, just like the holy of holies in God's house. On this new earth the fruit trees bear fruit every month! Treasures from the nations enrich it. God's blessings make this new paradise fruitful in an unbelievable degree.

You build towards this fulfilled temple of God with men. You invest for this future of glory.

Do not neglect to support this building project! Generously give your first fruits to the LORD. Listen to what God said to his people:

"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse-- the whole nation of you-- because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty. Then all the nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land," says the LORD of hosts (Malachi 3:8-12).

Build the house of the LORD! As living members contribute generously to the expansion of God's house, until Jesus brings the new earth.

Amen