

After seventy years of captivity, the Jewish people heard the prophet's cry: "Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye." (ISA 48:20).

Jeremiah came forth preaching, *"In those days, and in that time... the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward... remove out of the midst of Babylon."* (JER 50:4-5,8).

"Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity." JER 51:6

Only 42,000 men and their dependants got out of Babylon. They returned to Jerusalem with weeping and great supplication. There, they repaired the altar and instituted the daily sacrifices.

Here is a picture of a people who removed themselves completely from the corruption and idolatry of the world! They returned to the Lord with all their hearts, separating themselves to God. These people represent today's righteous, holy remnant who have come out of dead religiosity and everything that once hindered their spiritual growth.

Yet God's goal for the Israelites - as well as for us today - has never been just separation from the world. You may have come out of a dead, Babylonian church system, something that brought death to your soul. Perhaps you once lived a double life - your mind corrupted and your growth in the Lord hindered. But then you heard a call! God was stirring you. You longed to be among Christians of like precious calling - and God brought you out! Now you can say, "I believe I'm growing, because I

It's Not Enough To Get Out Of Babylon!

have a heart for God. I've been separated from the world!"

Yet it's not enough to say, as the Jews did in Israel, "We have arrived! This is the Lord's ultimate goal for us. We're separated from sin, we've come out of Babylon. We're now given wholly unto God!" You see, as they were saying this, God's testimony lay in ruin! The temple represented the Lord's testimony on earth. When all things were ordered according to God's plan and purpose, the temple was blessed with God's presence. People such as the Queen of Sheba came and watched Solomon go to the temple. Just the experience of it took her breath away! Such people had great reverence and awe for the God of Israel!

But sin caused God's presence to leave the temple. Whenever sin came in, the glory would depart and the temple would fall into decay! When God told Israel to come out of Babylon, He didn't just want them to flee that corrupted city and society. **He called them to go to Jerusalem to raise up a testimony - to restore and build His house!** That was their first calling: "Go to Jerusalem and build My house! Take My interest upon you first!"

God had stirred the hearts of the ministers and leaders, Joshua the

high priest and Zerubbabel the prince. They went to work with great vigor - but when opposition set in, they began to lose heart. For sixteen years the temple stood ignored. And a thousand excuses came to their minds as to why they couldn't continue God's work.

The Story of Haggai Is Vital to Us - Because The Lord Has Stirred Us and Spoken to Us The Same Words: "Get Out of Babylon - and Build My House!"

God has given us a burden for the homeless, the poor and the needy. He doesn't want us just to sit here and eat our morsel alone. He's telling us to put His house and His interests first! He's saying, "I didn't call you just to be separated, just to be holy, just to praise. Yes, those things are good. But I called you out of Babylon for a greater purpose. I want to prepare you - to use you to raise up My testimony!"

Beloved, there's a testimony lying in total ruin. I ask you: What has the church shown the world of Jesus Christ in the past fifteen years? **A Christ of riches, of prosperity, of begging and pleading to support men's dreams and empires!**

Yet all the while, the true testimony of Christ lies waste! And God is calling a people in these times to

rebuild the true testimony of who Christ is! He is the One who hears the heart-cry of the poor. He's a loving Christ who cares. He reaches down to help the needy, the homeless!

In Revelation 18:2-4 John cries out, "*Babylon the great is fallen... Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.*" I've been preaching that same message for twelve years! Babylon represents a backslidden, wicked society, in collusion with an apostate, backslidden church! For us, Babylon represents a life of spiritual indifference, sloth and worldly compromise - a religion empty of God and His holiness!

Right now there is a growing remnant of holy, separated Christians whose hearts have been stirred. This is a sovereign work of God! These believers could no longer put up with the wickedness and compromise in their church. They heard the Holy Spirit calling them to a life of holiness and separation from the world! Now they have come out of Babylon, out of the deadness and corruption of apostasy. They no longer bow to the idols of this age. They are a holy people, truly separated - a people hungry to go deeper in the Lord.

But just getting out of Babylon is not enough! It is not enough to say, "God has cleansed me and I've left my old ways behind! I've truly changed! I'm out of that old Babylonian, religious graveyard!"

You see, that particular gospel started out with some very pious, godly men. They were God-hungry, stirred, believing there was more to serving God than what they'd seen in the dead, religious system around them. They began to see that God wanted to bless His people, to put resources in their hands for a purpose. And, like Israel, these people stepped out of Babylon and discovered that God blesses those who truly trust Him.

We see this in the Old Testament. God promised to bless the Jews who set their hearts toward Jerusalem. But He provided all those blessings with the intention that the people would build His house first - to restore a testimony that had been ruined!

Today we are to use God-given resources to feed the poor, to clothe the naked, to house and maintain the widows and to rescue the fatherless and homeless. **That's why God wants to pour out His blessings on us - so we can give them away!**

God's people have always prayed, "Oh God, bless me so I can bless the needy! Prosper me so I'll have more to give to your work!" This appears in the literature of all prosperity teachers as well: "God wants to enrich you so you will have more to give to the Lord's cause." But there's something awry in human nature: Once we get our hands on resources, we immediately begin to set goals for ourselves instead of giving those blessings away. This is what has happened with the prosperity gospel in this last hour.

I believe God was trying to raise up a testimony. He wanted a church that, through His Son, Jesus, would stand in the darkest days to come - a church that would believe God for resources and for an anointing. God wanted a people He could trust! People who wouldn't spend money on themselves, but who would give it out - so that others in the last days would see a Christ who could do what no government could do!

But what happened? Instead of reaching out to the poor and needy, Christians who have been blessed financially spend their resources on themselves. They shop 'til they drop! Few have put the Lord's heart first in their giving. They give when it's convenient, or out of guilt. Instead of living by faith and giving away what God has given them, they buy more and more for themselves and give only what's left over. Yes, it is good to say, "Lord, bless me so I can bless others!" But outside of those with hearts broken before the Lord, God's people never follow through!

That happened with Israel. Eventually, the people stopped building God's house. For sixteen years they said, "*The time is not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built.*" (HAG 1:2). They had only laid the foundation - and they found hundreds of excuses why

they could not do what God had called them to do! The task was too expensive, and the economy was weakening. They said, "The time is not right. We'll wait until conditions improve." But the future looked bleak. Crops were failing, businesses were going under, wage earners were losing money as fast as they made it: "*He that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.*" (HAG 1:6).

It's clear that they wanted to build God's house. They saw it as a true vision from God. But they said it was not the appropriate time: "We hardly have enough for our own families. How can we undertake this huge project when most can't even make ends meet? Even Solomon burdened the people in taking on so much."

So not another stone was laid for sixteen years. Yet in that period the people found all the money, time and resources they needed to build **their own houses** and to secure their own interests!

They built fine homes, expensive furnishings, cedar wainscoting, carved ceilings! They did not forsake the altar nor the sacrifices - but they preoccupied themselves with their own family's needs: "Surely God expects me to care for my family. He's a good God, and we love Him. As soon as we get our needs met, we'll go all-out for God!" Finally the Lord said: "*Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?*" (HAG 1:4).

In other words, "For sixteen years you've said, 'It's not time for God's house to be built, it's not time for His interests' - yet you went out and got whatever you wanted. Is it not time now to step out by faith and do what I commanded you? Yet you go home to your lovely houses with fine furniture and you say, 'God understands.' You go out and eat what you want, do what you want, buy what you want - but when you consider the needs of the poor, you say, 'It's too costly, too expensive!'"

Haggai said to the people, "I want to show you what happens when you put off obeying the command of God!"

The Right Time to Do What God Tells You Is The Moment He

Sends His Prophetic Word And Stirs Your Heart!

God's commands are to be obeyed as soon as they are revealed! No delays, no excuses, no putting them off while we pursue our own interests. Something sovereign happens to those who procrastinate in doing what God commands. While they're saying, "It's not the right time; I've got too many irons in the fire," God calls down a drought on them!

"Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit." (HAG 1:9-10)

Haggai was explaining why these people were so dry, empty and bored! The people could not understand the strange experience that was common among them: They were never satisfied! They had a deep, unquenched inner thirst. The more money they spent, the more things they needed - and the unhappier they became! When we don't obey God, He blows on our blessings and withers them. An **inner withering** takes place!

This Divine Restlessness, This Deep Inner Drought, Is God's Loving Judgment to Keep Us From Being Overcome By a Consuming Self-Interest!

I have experienced this kind of caring judgment - to do so much for God and yet feel so much is unfinished. To work so hard and yet feel like I haven't gotten anywhere.

It's an unexplainable sense of doing much but accomplishing little, of restlessness of soul. It is to love God, yet sense that you haven't touched something He wants. It's to know there's something you've missed! Am I explaining something that's happening in your life right now? Maybe you're serving God, but you're not totally fulfilled and satisfied in your Christian walk. You have a spiritual dryness, a deadness inside, while everyone around you is moving ahead in the Lord. God may be

saying to you, "I caused the drought!"

Beloved, this is not God's wrath. It is His love bringing it upon us!

You see, God calls for the drought to show us the futility and emptiness of all that caters to self and flesh! It is God's loving hand at work: "I will not let you get swallowed up in selfishness, so I'm sending a drought - to save you!"

The people of Israel believed both the messenger and His message! They laid aside all their own thoughts, all their own messages. They did not say, "I, too, hear from God - and I know it's not time to build yet!" No! They allowed God's Word to touch their hearts (See Haggai 1:14). They were stirred! You see, Haggai wasn't condemning them for having fine houses or for being blessed. Those were by-products of walking in covenant with God. God **does** want to bless His people!

But the prophet was calling the people back to a proper balance! The people responded by laying aside their own thoughts. And in just twenty-three days they advanced from a **stirring** to a **doing!**

God Moves In Quickly When His People Get Busy Obeying His Word and Building His House!

The very hour the people decided to do what God commanded, the Lord opened up the storehouses of heaven and earth! God sent Haggai back with this message: *"The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts"* (HAG 2:8). He was saying, "Never again look at the economy. Never again be afraid because the future looks bleak. It's all mine. I will supply all you need!"

New York City will run out of money! The banks are going under! The state and federal governments are collapsing - but God is as wealthy as ever and His storehouse never diminishes! And He wants to give His resources to His people - not to spend on themselves, but to establish His testimony!

You can do the Lord's work with confidence, *"...for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts."* (HAG 2:4). *"According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of*

Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land." (HAG 2:6-7).

The rebuilding was a very big and expensive undertaking, and the Israelites had almost nothing to work with! Yet God said, "Because you decided to step out in faith - because you have a heart to build My house and raise up My testimony - I am going to shake heaven and earth! Don't look at the economy or the future. Keep your eyes on Me, and get to work! I am with you- and that's all you need to know!"

Jesus said, *"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."* (LK 6:38).

At this point the local governor had not sold the Israelites any products. They had been hemmed in on all sides. And for sixteen years, they were hindered in the work.

The people asked themselves, "How are we going to get all the lumber? Our neighbors won't even say hello to us. They're cursing us!"

Yet nevertheless, the Israelites committed to the work. **That's all God needs - a willing people ready to work!**

With the people's commitment made solely on faith, God decided to bless them beyond all they could imagine. Suddenly, with the stroke of a pen, **God provided for every need to be met!**

He knew they would follow through! Now they were getting excited about doing **His** work. And before the first stone was laid, God began to pour out His blessings! (HAG 2:13-19)

God said, "Consider now from this day upward" - meaning, "Take notice! Mark it on your calendar! Before now, you did your own thing, you built for yourself. But now things will change. No more boredom! No more feeling of accomplishing nothing! You're just

beginning! From now on I will water your soul with great joy, peace, a sense of total fulfillment. I'm going to give you My strength and life! I'm going to make this a city of peace!"

Here is why this prophecy of Haggai has so chastened me personally. God has stirred our hearts to step out in faith and to raise up a testimony of the love and care of Jesus for the poor, needy and destitute in this city. **We have been challenged to build a house of compassion!**

The job seems overwhelming. There are some 90,000 homeless people in New York City alone, and the numbers are growing. Even some of our congregation could be put out of their homes if they lost their jobs. The economy is collapsing and the future is scary!

Trying to work with city agencies is like getting lost in a jungle. I know without a doubt that the Lord has blessed us by putting us in a place to do what He commands. And I know that if we do not act - and act now - a spiritual drought will be called down upon us.

God will blow on our blessings and smite us *"with blasting and with mildew"* (HAG 2:17). He'll cause us to become self-centered, complaining, unhappy Christians getting poorer by the day.

Yet even though God assured me of His provision, I became afraid recently when I read an article in **The New York Times**, entitled "The Depression is Here."

A bankruptcy lawyer was saying that the real estate market will collapse in about nine months -

that you shouldn't buy property now, because in a year it will be available for a fraction of the current cost.

Immediately upon seeing that, I thought, "It's not time to move ahead with a home for widows and unwed mothers, or one for homeless men and addicts. Next year it will be cheaper!" I called one of our board members. I said to him, "Maybe we ought to wait..."

Thank God for the boldness of that dear brother. The economy didn't faze him. He said, "Pastor, all that matters is whether or not God says this is the place and now is the time. We will do it, depression or no depression. God will see us through."

If that little spanking wasn't enough, I got all I needed when I went to prayer. The Holy Spirit told me to read Haggai - and what a chastening I got!

We had just ordered some new drapes for my study and had the walls painted and papered. While I sat in that room reading the words of God's prophet, I got convicted! I couldn't wait for Monday to get back to the office and get to work on **God's** house!

Not long ago a social worker said that "compassion fatigue" has hit New York. People are growing tired of seeing homeless beggars wherever they go, and they are distancing themselves emotionally from those suffering all around them.

Beloved, may that never happen to us! It dare not happen to the church of Jesus Christ! Because Christ always brings new life to those who suffer. He's the rain that

waters the garden and satisfies the drought, the spring that doesn't fall (ISA 58:11). Everything He touches springs to life!

If we don't reach out with that precious life, do you know what's going to happen? The very thing that happened to the people Haggai spoke these words to! Your interests will turn inward rather than outward. Everything you do will be a sham!

But God's not going to let that happen. He's saying, "I'm going to send My glory down on you! I'm going to give you all my resources - and all you have to do is make the commitment and stick to it!"

There is one final application to Haggai's prophecy. It is directed to those who have said, "This is not the time to give my all to Jesus. It will be some other time! I really mean to do it some day!"

You are harboring some self-interest that you think God will take from you. You say, "Later, when I make it, when I prove myself - **then** I'll give my all to Jesus!"

No - believe me, you won't! God may be calling you for the last time! His grace will always be available but your heart will be too hard to respond! **Today** is the day!

"To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation." (HEB 3:15).

Don't wait another moment - to say yes to Jesus!

by David Wilkerson
January 7, 1991

Copyright © 1991 by World Challenge, Lindale Texas

CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLIES INTERNATIONAL, P.O. BOX 888, COFFS HARBOUR NSW 2450, AUSTRALIA