

How to Lose in Life - False Perspective
A series on the message of Haggai: part 2 (R. Zuck)

1. Study Haggai 2:1-3. What contextual sense do you derive from these verses in light of Haggai 1? How does this reflect on us?

It was the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, which at the end of that week would normally be a time of great rejoicing. But here in verse 3, there was some disappointment and sadness for many.

God anticipated and voiced the words of the people, "Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison?" The older people had seen Solomon's temple when they were children, and this temple that was being constructed now was nothing. Maybe the size of the foundation was even less, and it was not nearly as elaborate. For 16 years the foundation had nothing built on it. Even 16 years before, when the foundation had been laid, the senior citizens were weeping when the rest of the people were rejoicing (see Ezra 3:10-13). And you couldn't tell who was weeping and who was rejoicing!

The people were comparing the former times with the present. They wanted to go back to the good old days. They belittled the present, because they unduly glorified the past. They were discouraged with what was going up now compared to the former temple. They didn't want to start the construction work in the first place. Once they did, then some of them began to belittle it. They had a false perspective. They failed to realize that God does not measure by size or grandeur.

We tend to measure spiritual progress by material standards. We compare ourselves with someone else, and either that's cause for our feeling good because we do better or bad because we believe we do worse. One writer said, "Most of us are afflicted with a sense of inferiority about our part in the Lord's work." We downgrade ourselves; we belittle our work and the significance of what God has given us to do. We have a low self-esteem.

2. Study Haggai 2:4-9. How did God encourage Haggai and respond to this? How do we apply this?

The result of their having this false perspective of belittling what they were doing was discouragement. What's the answer? First, God's presence; and second, God's plan.

God's presence is assured. "But now take courage, Zerubbabel... take courage also, Joshua... and all you people of the land take courage" (v. 4).

God's presence means that our work in the present is, or can be, as great as any work of God's people in the past. The fact that God is with you and in you means that your work is significant and that there is no need to compare yourself to someone else. God can use each of us in a way and in a place where He can use no one else.

But God's plan as a corrective to a false perspective is also a cause for encouragement. He says, "I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. And I will shake all the nations" (v. 6-7). This phrase indicates God's work at the return of the Lord at the Second Advent to establish His millennium. He is going to shake all the nations and cause them to come to Jerusalem, bringing their treasures for the building of the millennial temple (see v. 7).

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Haggai went on to say, “The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine... The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former... and in this place I will give peace” (v. 8-9). In elegance and spiritual glory the millennial temple would far exceed the glory of Solomon’s temple. Thus the people were involved with significant work.

He is saying that the future will be great, so we should not compare the present with the past. The people were having a part in building the temple now, and God is going to go beyond that and do something greater in the future. They ought to be encouraged by God’s plan.

Therefore we also need not compare the present with the past. What we ought to do is compare the present with the future and realize that God is working in us, fulfilling His program and His plan.

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