

False Assumption (R. Zuck)
A Series on How to Lose in Life: Part 3

1. Read Haggai 2:10-19. What is the significance of the date of Haggai's prophecy?

In contrast to Haggai's first two prophecies, which were delivered when Jews came to Jerusalem to celebrate compulsory feasts (Feast of the New Moon [Hag 1:1] and Festival of Tabernacles [Hag 2:1]), Haggai's third prophecy apparently did not fall on a holiday.

The temple has been under construction for about 3 months, and the rain season has begun.

Since Haggai's second message 2 months ago, the farmers have ploughed and planted their fields. And they are mindful of the agricultural curses God made for their failure to rebuild the temple in Haggai's first exhortation. Hopeful of a more bountiful harvest, they hear, in Haggai's third prophecy, comments that will affect the outlook of their harvest.

2. Study Haggai's use of the question answer literary device in Haggai 2:11-13. What is the point?

Haggai's questions are not intended to seek information; they are intended to teach. As he posed the questions to the Levitical priests, he was perhaps reminded of an earlier Old Testament example where Samuel said the sacrificial system is not adequate for atonement if one's heart is still disobedient (1 Samuel 15:19-24).

The first question, which the priests answer correctly, is based on Leviticus 6:25-27, in which the influence of holiness is limited. Meat sacrificed to God that is then touched by something else – the priest's garment fold, for example – is then in turn made holy. But if that fold touches something else, such as food, then that food is not made holy. Only direct contact of holy flesh will make something else holy.

The second question is more personal and highlights a contrast. The priests, who are aware of Leviticus 22:4-6, know that if one touches a dead body and then in turn touches some food, that food is unclean, and that food can pass on uncleanness to anything it comes in contact with. The influence of uncleanness, sin, is far greater and more extensive. An important principle in the Bible is that sin is contagious.

With their correct answers, Haggai conveys the Lord's judgment: the nation of Israel was unclean. Thus any offering they made was contaminated and unacceptable. There was no atonement by any work of the Law!

3. In Haggai 2:14-19, what did the Israelites discover and how might we learn from this?

Their sin of disobedience in not building the temple adversely affected other areas of their lives and made their sacrifices unacceptable to God. They falsely assumed that it was simply enough to bring their sacrifices and then God would automatically and immediately bless them. But in verse 15 he told them again to consider from this day onward.

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They had confused service with sanctification. They had confused productivity with purity. They believed that what they did externally would make up for what they lacked internally. But God doesn't work that way. We must start from within. If our hearts are right, then the work of our hands will be acceptable. It was by grace that the nation of Israel was restored (Hag 2:19).

We do not experience the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit by increasing the speed or quantity of our service. Conversely, to the extent that our hearts are right before God, then our service is acceptable. God doesn't measure us by our motions; he measures us by our motives.

Will activity somehow sanctify our hearts that might be filled with bitterness, disobedience, self-centeredness, and a critical spirit? No, it cannot. Christian service will not substitute for spiritual dedication.

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