

Haggai 1:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.

Analysis

Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. God diagnoses the futility that had gripped the people's economic life—despite hard work and reasonable efforts, nothing satisfied. The Hebrew structure emphasizes the frustrating cycle: sow-bring in little, eat-not enough, drink-not filled, clothe-not warm, earn-loses value. This wasn't lazy inactivity being punished but active labor producing inexplicably poor results.

The imagery is vivid and comprehensive, covering agriculture (sowing), food (eating), drink, clothing, and wages—the basic necessities of life. The phrase "bag with holes" (תִּזְרֹר נְקֻיָּו / tzeror naquv) captures the mystery: income that should provide somehow vanishes, unable to be retained. This isn't mere inflation or economic hardship but divine withdrawal of blessing, making prosperity impossible despite effort.

Theologically, this verse reveals that God controls the fruitfulness of human labor. Deuteronomy 28 promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, including precisely these frustrations (Deut 28:38-40). When God's people chronically neglect His purposes, He withholds blessing not vindictively but correctively—to expose the emptiness of life lived for self rather than for Him.

Satisfaction doesn't come from what we achieve but from right relationship with God.

This principle transcends material prosperity. Even successful, wealthy people experience this futility when God is marginalized—the restless dissatisfaction, the inability to be truly satisfied, the sense that despite having much, something essential is missing. Augustine famously wrote, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." Haggai exposes that no amount of earthly success satisfies a soul out of alignment with God's purposes.

Historical Context

The returned exiles had been working for sixteen years to reestablish themselves in Judah (536-520 BC). They planted crops, built houses, earned wages—yet something was wrong. Archaeological evidence from this period shows limited prosperity compared to earlier eras. The land hadn't fully recovered from Babylonian devastation, populations were small, and economic vitality was constrained.

Yet Haggai identifies the deeper issue: their futility wasn't merely circumstantial but theological. God was actively frustrating their efforts because they had abandoned His house while building their own. This connects to the covenant framework—Israel's prosperity was always tied to covenant faithfulness. When they prioritized themselves over God, He withdrew blessing to get their attention.

This pattern appears throughout Scripture. During the Judges, Israel experienced oppression when they abandoned God. Solomon warned that ignoring wisdom leads to poverty and want (Proverbs 21:5, 25). Jesus taught that life doesn't consist in abundance of possessions (Luke 12:15). Paul warned that seeking wealth leads to a trap of harmful desires (1 Timothy 6:9-10). True prosperity—spiritual, emotional, and ultimately material—comes from seeking first God's kingdom (Matthew 6:33).

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. In what areas of life do you experience the 'bag with holes' futility—working hard but never quite satisfied or secure?
2. How might God be using frustration, dissatisfaction, or lack of fulfillment to expose misplaced priorities or idolatries in your life?
3. What is the relationship between obedience to God's purposes and experiencing genuine satisfaction and blessing in life?
4. How does Jesus Christ ultimately fulfill our deepest hungers, thirsts, and needs in ways earthly prosperity never can (John 6:35, 7:37-38)?

Interlinear Text

וְאַתֶּם Ye have sown H2232	הַרְבֵּה much H7235	וְהֵבֵאתֶם and bring H935	מְעַט in little H4592	אֲכַלְתֶּם ye eat H398	וְאֵין H369
לְשֹׂבָעָה but ye have not enough H7654	וְשָׁתוּ ye drink H8354	וְאֵין H369	לְשֹׂכָה but ye are not filled with drink H7937	וְלִבְשׁ ye clothe H3847	
וְאַתֶּם H369	לֹא you but there is none warm H2527	וְ H0	וְהַ and he that earneth wages H7936	מִשְׁתַּכֵּר H7936	
וְהַ and he that earneth wages H7936	אֶל H413	צָר to put it into a bag H6872	וְ H5344	בְּקִיבִים with holes H5344	

Additional Cross-References

Haggai 1:9 (Parallel theme): 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.

Hosea 4:10 (Parallel theme): For they shall eat, and not have enough: they shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase: because they have left off to take heed to the LORD.

Hosea 8:7 (Parallel theme): For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up.

Haggai 2:16 (Parallel theme): Since those days were, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the pressfat for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty.

Malachi 2:2 (Parallel theme): If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.

Isaiah 5:10 (Parallel theme): Yea, ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and the seed of an homer shall yield an ephah.

Zechariah 5:4 (Parallel theme): I will bring it forth, saith the LORD of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name: and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof.

Zechariah 8:10 (Parallel theme): For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men every one against his neighbour.

Psalms 107:34 (Parallel theme): A fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.

Jeremiah 14:4 (Parallel theme): Because the ground is chapt, for there was no rain in the earth, the plowmen were ashamed, they covered their heads.

