

Session 38

HAGGAI

Haggai 1:1-4,7-15; 2:15-23

Memory Verse

The Lord of Armies says this: “Think carefully about your ways. Go up into the hills, bring down lumber, and build the house; and I will be pleased with it and be glorified,” says the Lord.

– HAGGAI 1:7-8, CSB



Haggai


THEOLOGICAL THEME: When God's people put Him first, they experience the blessings of the Lord. When they focus on selfish endeavors first, they are never satisfied.


CALL TO ACTION: In the brokenness of our past, we can look to the One who redeems our past and give us hope in Him for the future.

Anyone who has ever worked on a renovation or rebuilt something knows these efforts can get discouraging. Most of the time when you attempt to renovate a house or rebuild a structure, you find there are more issues and time-consuming things that throw your schedule off balance. You realize that what you thought was going to be a brand-new, redone kitchen in two months is now on month three without much light at the end of the tunnel.

When things go wrong, it can be frustrating to the point that you want to throw in the towel. Today, we are studying a book of the Bible in which the people of God were given the task to rebuild their devastated city of Jerusalem and the temple. This task was overwhelming, and they got their priorities out of order just like we do at times.

 When have you ever experienced a renovation or rebuild with issues that delayed the timeline?

 How does it make you feel to see your plans changed and prolonged?

 What helps you stay focused on the task at hand and not get overwhelmed by discouragement?

Session Summary

Everyone struggles with priorities at some time or another. The Israelites had finally returned home to Jerusalem from exile and began rebuilding. After years with no progress in constructing the temple, Haggai was given a word from the Lord to confront the people and steer them back the right way.

The Israelites had put themselves first. They justified their actions and made excuses about why they had neglected the temple, but God knew the real issue. He said that no matter what they did, built, or planted they would never be satisfied until they got their priorities in line. This reminds us that a focus on self is not the answer, and that obeying God leads to a life of blessing.

1. Wrong Priorities (Haggai 1:1-4)

To glean the most possible from this book of the Bible, it is important to know as much as possible about the day and time in which it occurred. Cyrus the Great was king of Persia, and he allowed a group of Israelites to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. The high priest of the day was Jeshua or Joshua and Zerubbabel was the local ruler in Judah. These were the main men leading the people in the rebuilding efforts as they worked to reestablish their city, land, and people.

Haggai was a minor prophet who spoke the words of the Lord to the people of Judah. A biblical prophet is considered minor due to the length of the books written, not because of a diminished message from God. Haggai's message was directed to the returned exiles, about seventy years after the exile began. The people were committed to rebuilding, and it was a difficult endeavor following the devastation of their land by the Babylonians. Haggai began with specific historical references that place these happenings around September of 520 BC.

? What struggles would you expect the people to have as they faced the rebuilding process after exile?

Imagine the struggle of these people who returned to rubble instead of glorious buildings and only a remnant in place of a mighty nation. It was a tough time for all those in Judah and God gave Haggai words of challenge and encouragement to the people. They were supposed to have been rebuilding the temple and yet the work had been stopped for fourteen years. Confronted with their neglect of the temple work, the people made excuses, even trying to justify with spiritual reasons.

God referring to the people as “these people” instead of “my people” was not good. The people were not acting like God’s people at the time, so He addressed them accordingly. God called out the excuses the people had been using for several years to drag out what they were supposed to do. Even when we cushion excuses in spiritual language like these people did, it is still disobedience before the Lord. They claimed that the timing was not right, but God saw past this excuse.

? What are some ways we might try and make spiritual sounding excuses for disobedience to the Lord? How can we assess these moments soberly?

God confronted the excuses of the people through Haggai and identified their reasoning as misplaced priorities. He pointed out that they had put the time and effort into building their own homes but neglected the house of the Lord. There was not anything wrong with the people investing in their own homes, but they had been so focused on their own comfort and protection that they neglected the house of God. Their priority to live in personal comfort luxury while disregarding that God’s temple was in ruins demonstrated how far off their priorities had gone.

? Application: How can you discern where your priorities truly lie? How can you invite others in to help you in this process?

2. God's Instructions (Haggai 1:7-15)

After calling out their misplaced priorities and excuses for disobedience, God gave Haggai words of instruction. God doesn't just call out our sin, He also gives the steps we need to take to be restored. Because the Lord cares that our priorities are in line with His will, He leads us to fix the issue just as He did with the Israelites.

? What stands out to you from what Haggai said to the people on God's behalf?

God called His people to get to work. Often there is hard work involved in serving and obeying the Lord. It is work that can be strengthened by prayer, but it is also real work that shouldn't be neglected with spiritual sounding excuses or pretend spiritual service. It was time for the people to get busy doing what the Lord commanded and focus on Him over their own physical comforts. This is a message for the church today as much as it was for the Israelites in that day. We are to be about the work of the ministry and reaching the lost world more than our own comfort and luxury.


? What are some ways you see the church of today struggling with the same misplaced priorities as the Israelites? How do you struggle with these things personally?

God pointed out that when their priorities were out of line, even though their work may seem successful it wouldn't satisfy them. Even when we accomplish certain things like building houses, finding success at work, or making money, if we neglect the Lord in the process, the satisfaction will fall short.

Another consequence for their disobedience was a season of drought. While they thought the drought was an attack of the enemy, it was brought about by God to draw attention to their misplaced priorities. The problem wasn't the enemy but their own choices and priorities.


In response, the leaders of the day listened to the Lord and used their influence and position for the good of the people. Setting the example of obedience, Zerubbabel and Joshua led the people to realign their priorities and live in obedience to the voice of the Lord as expressed through Haggai the prophet. This is a reminder that God often speaks through His Word, His Spirit, and His people. Our job is to listen to the Lord and obey Him as the people did in this passage.

Verse 13 records God's response to the people's obedience. God was with them to encourage and strengthen them for the task just as He is with us to strengthen and encourage us as we follow Him. The Lord doesn't just command us to do things, but He also strengthens and empowers us to carry out what He instructs. The Lord stirred up the spirit of the leaders and the people. And God still works among His people today to stir us to obedience before Him.

 **Application: Where do you need the Lord to stir up your spirit with His encouragement and strength today?**

3. Promised Blessing (Haggai 2:15-23)

These verses remind us difficulties don't automatically draw us closer to God. How we respond to times of chastening either bring us closer to God or not. God promised to bless the people if they would put their priorities in the right order with Him first. This was a challenge for that day and today. We easily get caught up in life and less important matters while letting our relationship with the Lord slide away.

 **How have you experienced difficulties bringing you closer to God or pulling you further away according to your response?**

Although the blessings Haggai spoke of might not be immediate, the Lord promised they would come, and the people should not get discouraged but trust in Him. With the history of their ancestors, the Israelites had ample evidence that God always fulfills His promises. They heard the stories and had seen God work in their own lives through the captivity. Those experiences were meant to grow trust God even when it was hard.

Haggai also stressed that trusting in the Lord was the right choice to make because He is the power above all powers and nothing on earth or in the heavens is beyond the scope of His rule. The Lord promised to fight for His people, and He would be victorious.

? When have you trusted that you were on the winning side with the Lord even if it didn't appear so at the time? When have you failed to trust this?

In address to Zerubbabel, God spoke of the signet ring that was a symbol of royal authority and power. Zerubbabel was from the tribe of Judah and in the lineage of Christ. His line was established, and he was in the blood lineage of Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as the legal lineage of Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus. The Lord had chosen this line from the beginning and Zerubbabel was included in the plans of God.

In the brokenness of their past that led to exile, God was working to bring His people home and restore them fully. God is still working to restore His people to right relationship with Him. The Israelites learned to keep their priorities straight, obey God, and experience the blessings of righteous choices. We are called to do the same.


? Application: Where are you most challenged or encourage by the passages we've studied today?


Conclusion

Haggai was a minor prophet tasked with encouraging the Israelites after they returned from captivity and began rebuilding. Although they finished their own homes, they fell short of rebuilding the house of the Lord. Haggai confronted the people with the reminder that no matter what they worked for in their fields or homes, unless their priorities were in the right order, they would remain in disobedience and dissatisfaction.

The right thing to do was obey God and get their priorities in line. Until they focused on what was most important, God would withhold His blessing. At first the Israelites made excuses about why the work on the temple had been neglected. Even though they used spiritual sounding phrases, the truth was they were more focused on their own comfort and luxury than they were on obeying the instruction of the Lord. God encouraged them that when they readjusted and chose obedience, He would be with them and empower them for the task at hand. The result would be better than anything they had planned for themselves.

 What tempts you to lose focus on the Lord and give your attention to things of less importance?

 How can we as a group help keep each other focused on the things God has called us to daily?

 How do right priorities and focus on the Lord make us more attentive to opportunities for gospel conversations with others?

Memorize

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