

**Week of May 5, 2013**  
***Haggai: A Message of Hope***

**Passage Outline:**

1. **A Question of Priorities** - Haggai. 1:2-9
2. **A Word of Encouragement** - Haggai 2:4-5,9
3. **A Promise of Protection** - Haggai 2:18-19,23

**What's This About and Why is it important:**

Our study is about the hope that makes us secure in God's hands when we embrace and live according to godly priorities. This study will urge you to find hope by reordering your priorities and conforming them to God's agenda.

**1. A Question of Priorities - Haggai 1:2-9**

<sup>2</sup>This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.'" <sup>3</sup>Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: <sup>4</sup>"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" <sup>5</sup>Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>6</sup>You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it." <sup>7</sup>This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>8</sup>Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the LORD. <sup>9</sup>"You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house.

The phrase "*The word of the Lord came*" occurs five times in Haggai (Hag. 1:1,3; 2:1,10,20) and each time Haggai was the recipient. This means two things. First, the sentence confirms that the oracles given to Haggai came from God, not Haggai's opinion or belief. Second, Haggai was the God-called messenger to speak to the people of post-exilic Judah. God had something to say, and He said it in four brief messages.

**Please read the article "Zechariah and Haggai: Motivators and Builders" contained in the Heavy Duty Preparation Packet.**

God challenged the people to reorder their priorities to make rebuilding His temple their primary concern. When their own pursuits had been first priority, the people had experienced emptiness, despite their efforts to attain fulfillment. How true that is for our own lives.

When opposition to building the temple arose (recorded in Ezra 4), the returnees responded by changing their priorities. They turned their attention from God's agenda and replaced it with their own. They made an excuse: "The time has not come for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt." It wasn't convenient, materials were not available, the workers were too few, or the political atmosphere was wrong. No doubt they made many excuses; so they focused on their own needs.

God countered by asking a serious question, "Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while My house lies in ruins?" God made an important point about time. If it isn't time to be concerned about the things of God, then what time is it? When we don't make serving the Lord of time a priority, something else will quickly fill that position. If anyone or anything comes first before God, then it becomes an idol, a false god. The Judeans gave their comfort and success first place. By taking their eyes off of God, the people made their needs and concerns false idols. They lived in fancy houses, while the Lord's house had broken walls and no

ceiling. This was unacceptable, and the reason they were not experiencing God blessings. If the people would only pay attention, they would easily recognize the results of not putting God first.

They worked hard, but the crops didn't bear enough to be satisfied. Their clothing did not keep them warm. And, to use more modern terms, there was too much month at the end of the money. The Judeans continuously missed the blessing of God because they had wrong priorities; they were selfish and lacked commitment to God's agenda.

God wanted Judah to consider their ways, repent, and rebuild the temple. Only then would God be pleased and glorified. Like the tabernacle in the wilderness, the temple symbolized the dwelling presence of the covenant God of Israel. The worship of God in the temple was to serve as the focus for the community. There they would experience the glory of the Holy One of Israel. God wills for His people to put Him first and pursue Him, regardless of circumstances (Matthew 6:33).

The result was that the "spirit of Zerubbabel was stirred up" along with "the spirit of the high priest Joshua" and "all the remnant of the people" (Hag. 1:14). They "obeyed the voice of the LORD" and reacted by resuming work on the unfinished temple on September 21, 520 B.C.

We often spend so much time on our needs and desires, we have little or no time, energy, or money to spend on God's. Evaluate your own life. Do you ever find yourself striving harder and harder to meet your responsibilities, yet experiencing the dissatisfaction described in these verses? If so, God might be questioning the Priorities in your life?

## **2. A Word of Encouragement - Haggai 2:4-5,9**

<sup>4</sup> But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD. 'Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the LORD, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the LORD Almighty. <sup>5</sup> 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.' ... <sup>9</sup> 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty."

Having godly priorities compels us to work diligently to promote God's causes and to trust God in the process. In order to rebuild the temple, the people of Judah needed to make a total commitment.

Rebuilding the temple was risky. Opposition had arisen early from the enemies of Judah and had succeeded in stopping the work altogether. Their enemies had also bribed local officials to act against them and frustrate plans to rebuild (Ezra 4:1-5). Any attempt to resume work on the temple could possibly be deemed as disobedience or rebellion to the Persian government. As a result, the Judeans became discouraged and fear stopped the building process.

God spoke a second time to Haggai on October 17, 520 B.C. This time God sought to encourage and to calm the fears of both Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, Joshua, the high priest and the people. With less than 50,000 returnees and limited resources, the Judeans must have thought the task overwhelming. To attempt to match the beauty and appearance of Solomon's temple (1 Chron. 29:1-8) was impossible. It took Solomon seven years with almost 200,000 workmen to build the first temple (1 Kings 5:13-16; 6:38). Some of the older returnees had seen the glory of Solomon's temple. To their eyes this building seemed "like nothing" in comparison to the first (Hag. 2:3). But God wanted them to know that their efforts to rebuild the temple would be successful because of His promised presence and power (see Zech. 4:6).

God give four commands in this section of Haggai. Three times God said, "Be Strong" one for each of the three recipients Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all the people of the land. They are not to fear the enemies of Judah nor

the task at hand of building the temple. In the last command, God used one word. He said, “Work!”, followed by the only reason that would help make their resolve stronger and the work possible: “For I am with you!” God promised His presence. The people of Judah would not toil alone in this great task. We have that same promise of our God today. Jesus promised, “I am with you always even until the end of time.”

God would do this because He brought them up out of Egypt and made a promise, a covenant with them at Sinai. There He promised they would be His people and He would be their God. Haggai said God’s Spirit remained (literally, “was standing”) in their midst. Consequently, they did not need to be afraid.

Then the Lord of Hosts declared that the final glory of this house would be greater than the first, and in this place, He will provide peace. The final glory could signify that the magnificence of the temple built by Zerubbabel and eventually expanded by Herod would exceed that of Solomon’s. It is possible as well that this implies the glory of the first coming of Jesus to the temple, when Mary and Joseph would bring the Christ child to be dedicated there (Luke 2:21-25). Through Christ, believers become the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).

### **3. A Promise of Protection - Haggai 2:18-19,23**

<sup>18</sup> From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid. Give careful thought: <sup>19</sup> Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit. "From this day on I will bless you." ... <sup>23</sup> "On that day," declares the LORD Almighty, 'I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD, 'and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,' declares the LORD Almighty."

The last two prophetic messages came to Haggai on the same day, December 18, 520 B.C. (Hag. 2:10,20). The first of these two messages pointed out that the lack of commitment on the part of the people had prevented God’s blessing. God wanted to go on the record. He wanted Judah to mark the date down. From this day on, December 18, 520 B.C., God will bless them. But up to this point, the vine, the fig, the pomegranate, and the olive tree had not yet produced. But from this moment on, God’s blessing would come.

In the second and last message God assured them He would triumph over the world and provide a special sign involving the coming of the Messiah. This oracle looked past the present day to the future and beyond. In this brief message God declared He had chosen Zerubbabel to rule with divine blessing. The signet ring was a seal designating authority, built into a ring and stamped to display the seal. God’s serious intent to accomplish this is indicated by the threefold use of the words “declares the Lord Almighty.”

The words, “On that day” implies a future Day of the Lord when God would establish a new eternal kingdom through His chosen Messiah. It is significant that God called Zerubbabel “My servant” a phrase used by Isaiah to apply to the Messiah (Isa. 42:1; 52:13; 53:11).

But Zerubbabel was not to be the Messiah, however. That role would be given to the ultimate son of David, Jesus of Nazareth who traced his ancestry through Zerubbabel (Matt. 1:13-16). Jesus will rule the world in the coming kingdom of God. This promise of victory for those who are committed to God has provided hope for believers, both in this life and the world to come.

## **Biblical Truths of This Lesson in Focus**

1. We should rejoice in whatever God has given us to do, whether seemingly great or small.
2. It is God's will for His people to put Him first and pursue Him, regardless of circumstances.
3. We should obey God, knowing our obedience will be rewarded either in this life or in the life to come.
4. As believers, we must understand that when we reorder our priorities to match God's agenda, this pleases Him.
5. Godly priorities will compel us to work diligently to promote God's causes and to trust God in the process.
6. Commitment costs and requires effort, but God promises to be with us and protect us.
7. Through the final work of the Messiah, God will establish His eternal kingdom.

Ask God to reveal to you a reordering of your priorities that needs to happen so they conform to God's agenda.

## **Historical Background: *The Three Temples of Israel***

Three historical temples have been built in Jerusalem. All three were constructed on the same distinctive hill immediately north of the city. That site was originally purchased by David (2 Sam. 24:18-25). This site has also been identified as Mount Moriah, where Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac (2 Chron. 3:1; Gen. 22:1-14).

While David planned the first temple and stockpiled the materials for it, his son Solomon actually built it (1 Kings 5-9; 2 Chron. 2-7). Solomon's temple was ornately decorated, paneled with cedar, floored with cypress, and inlaid with gold throughout. Israel worshiped here until the Babylonians destroyed the temple in 586 B.C.

Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple in the postexilic period at the urging of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1-2). It may have been the same size as Solomon's but much less ornate (Hag. 2:3). Completed in 515 B.C., this second temple was dedicated with great joy (Ezra 6:14-16). Judas Maccabeus rededicated this temple in 164 B.C. after its pollution by Antiochus. The Romans captured Jerusalem, including the temple, in 63 B.C., but they left it intact and allowed continued use of it.

When Herod became king of Judea in 37 B.C., he decided to please the Jews and impress the Romans by massively expanding and rebuilding Zerubbabel's temple. This third temple was the scene of many New Testament events. The boy Jesus came to this temple (Luke 2:42-50). He later taught there (John 7:14), and cleansed it by throwing out the moneychangers and the sellers (Matt. 21:12). Ironically, the Romans destroyed Herod's temple in A.D. 70.