

Haggai

Introduction

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Why read this book?

Read Haggai to escape—or, better yet, to avoid—the spiritual doldrums. If you’ve ever felt discouraged or complacent about your spiritual life, Haggai has encouraging words for you. Though aimed at correcting a particular situation long ago, the lessons of this prophetic book remain relevant for today. When spiritual vitality seems to be ebbing away, Haggai meets the problem head-on.

Who wrote this book?

The prophet Haggai. His name means *my feast*, suggesting that he may have been born during a temple feast.

When was it written?

Haggai delivered his messages in 520 B.C.

What was happening at this time?

Eighteen years before Haggai’s prophecy, the Persian king Cyrus had allowed thousands of Jews to return from Babylon to Judah (538 B.C.). Though the Jews had begun rebuilding the temple 16 years earlier, the opposition of neighboring peoples had intimidated them and caused them to abandon their work on the temple.

To whom was it written and why?

Haggai directed his messages specifically to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the high priest. But since they were the civil and religious leaders, they represented all the Jews who had returned from exile and needed Haggai’s message. His purpose was simple and direct: he wanted them to see that they had deprived themselves of God’s blessings by allowing the temple building project to lie dormant.

Haggai

Introduction

What to look for in Haggai:

Look for the ways in which God rebukes, challenges and encourages his people. Also note how closely connected obedience and blessing are. You will also find prophecies regarding God's coming Messianic kingdom.

—*From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)*



Haggai

Leader's Guide

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Haggai



How to finish the job when enthusiasm fades

Next to Obadiah, Haggai is the shortest book in the Old Testament, but its brevity does not mean that its message should be ignored. Haggai clearly shows what happens when we disobey God, and what can happen when we turn back to an attitude of obedience.

Scripture: Haggai

Based On: "The Minor Prophets: God Still Speaks to Us Today," by Tom Cowan

Haggai

Leader's Guide

Part 1 Identify the Issue

It was the year 536 B.C., and King Cyrus of Persia had written a decree that said that those who had been taken in the exile which began in 586 B.C. would be able to return home to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple if they wished. Many did just that, going back to their homeland with great enthusiasm. However, their initial zeal to rebuild the temple as the center of spiritual life soon faded.

Haggai spoke over a four month period in 520 B.C. His message was a challenge to the people to set their spiritual priorities in place and to see the house of God as the center of their life. A key phrase in Haggai is “consider your ways.”

[Q] What programs or initiatives have you been involved in that started strong but then petered out? Why did they fizzle, in your opinion?

[Q] Do you believe blessing always follows obedience? Why or why not?

Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Worshiping God is our central priority.

Get your priorities straight! Pay attention! Stop dragging your feet! God's message through Haggai to his returning people was cut and dried. Their job was to complete the temple, and then the blessings of God would come. No sooner. No later.

Read Haggai 1.

[Q] What excuses do you think the people would give for not setting God's house as a priority (v. 2)?

[Q] What happened to the people when they put their own needs first, and left God's house unfinished (vv. 3–12)?

[Q] How does verse 6 describe what it is like today when we have to make ends meet?

[Q] How does Haggai get the people back on track?

[Q] Relate Haggai 1:3–12 to Matthew 6:25–34, where Jesus says that the kingdom of God is to be our priority. What does he mean by the kingdom of God? How does setting the kingdom of God as a spiritual priority meet our daily physical needs?

[Q] Read Haggai 2:1–5. How does Haggai challenge the people?

Haggai

Leader's Guide

[Q] What do you think God means in Haggai 2:9?

[Q] There are times when it can be helpful to reflect back on “the good old days.” How can this be encouraging to us? How can this become a hindrance to moving ahead?

[Q] Sometimes we begin some new ministry with great enthusiasm and zeal. However, that quickly fades, and we find ourselves in the same emotional and spiritual slump that the people did in Haggai’s day. What steps can we take to prevent this happening?

Teaching Point Two: We face life’s winter as a committed gospel community.

We always seem to forget, but blessing really does follow obedience to God! When his remnant finally builds the temple, God promises to bless them.

[Q] Read Haggai 2:10–19. What is the main point in this passage? What is God saying?

[Q] What does the message of Haggai say to us about giving God the first place in our lives?

[Q] Share an incident in your life when you did *not* do this. What happened? Now talk about a time you did do this, and God provided for your needs.

[Q] What does it mean for God to bless us? What does that look like?

Optional Activity:

Purpose: *To put God at the center.*

Activity: *Spend some time as a group worshipping God. Bring out the guitar and the chorus booklets, or the piano and the hymnal. Praise him for his faithfulness and blessings. Center yourself on God!*

Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Did you forget? Worship of God is our central priority! And God-centered obedience leads to his blessings being poured out on us! Is God calling you to renew your attention to these truths?

Action Point: *Get your priorities straight! Pay attention! Stop dragging your feet! Where in your life is God sending you these messages? Take some time soon for repentance, and then make an action plan for obedience.*

—Study by Tom Cowan, with Kyle White

