

Take a Good Look at Your Life

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from Jerry Vines Ministries
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Let's Begin

At the end of the Old Testament, there are twelve books known as the Minor Prophets. The first nine were written before the children of Israel were carried away into captivity. These prophets warned the Jews that God's judgment would come and they would be carried into captivity if they did not repent of their sins. The people refused to repent, and so God's judgment came. First the Assyrians carried the Northern Kingdom away. Then, just a little over one hundred years later, the Babylonians carried off Judah, the Southern Kingdom. But just as God had also promised, after seventy years He returned the people of Judah to their land. This is when the last three Minor Prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—ministered. Haggai and Zechariah were contemporaries, and Malachi's ministry came years later. They each came at an important time in the history of God's people.

The book of Haggai is our focus of study today. We do not know a great deal about Haggai, but we do know that God used him to speak a message of encouragement to the Jews who returned to Judah (cp. Ezra

5:1; 6:14). If you remember, once the Jews were given permission to return to their land, only a remnant or small group returned. Most had grown comfortable in their captivity. They were not interested in going back and taking up the formidable task of rebuilding Jerusalem and its temple. This is so much like the world today. Many believers have grown comfortable in this world and are not interested in doing the Lord's work. Even for those who are, there is the constant danger of drifting back into living for this world. This is what happened to the remnant. Using the outline below, let's see how God uses Haggai to stir the people's hearts to take a good look at their lives and to get them back on task in doing the Lord's work. As we look at his four messages, we will also see how Haggai can have the same challenge for us today.

I. Selfishness (1:1-15)

II. Greatness (2:1-9)

III. Cleanness (2:10-19)

IV. Faithfulness (2:20-23)

I. Selfishness (1:1-15)

We are told that Haggai's first message was preached in what we would know as September 1, 520 B.C. In 536 B.C. the people had returned to Judah amid great excitement and enthusiasm. But they were

met with opposition from the outside and discouragement soon set in on the inside (cp. Ezra 4:1-6:11). As a result, for fifteen years the work on the city walls and the temple stopped. During that time, the people's priorities

got out of order as they selfishly turned their attention to their own interests.

In verse 2 we read, "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that



the Lord's house should be built." The people's excuse in not rebuilding the temple was that it was not the right time to do so. But Haggai shows the people how their priorities were wrong. We read, "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" (1:4). They had time for their own interests but not for the things of the Lord. This is why God's house was in a state of disrepair.

When our priorities are out of order, it will lead to disparity. This is why Haggai next says, "Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways" (1:5). He then shows them in verse 6 how they were working harder and harder but having less and less satisfaction. He tells them, "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" (1:6).

Even today when we selfishly put our priorities before the Lord, we lose His blessings. If we can

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identify with verse 6, we may also need to "consider our ways."

Haggai gives the people a challenge from God in verse 8, "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build a house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified saith the Lord." If they would take care of God's house, He would be able to bless them. In verses 9 through 11, Haggai again reminds the people that they were missing the blessings of the Lord because His house was sitting in ruins.

God was looking for one response from the people—

humble obedience. The good news is this is how the people responded. Verse 12 says, "Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord." Because of this, the Lord gave them a wonderful promise: "... I am with you, saith the Lord" (1:13). Verse 14 says, "... and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God." Verse 15 tells us it was just twenty-three days after Haggai's original message. The people responded with humility, laid aside their selfishness, and returned to doing the work of the Lord.

Reflection Connection

Read Matthew 6:33 and discuss how this verse tells us what and why our priority in life should be.

II. Greatness (2:1-9)

Haggai's second message came on October 21, some seven weeks later, and was a message concerning greatness (cp. 2:1). As the temple was being built, there were some who remembered the glory of Solomon's temple, their first temple. Because the new temple was smaller, instead of looking forward and claiming

God's blessing for the future, they started looking backward. As a result, their hearts were filled with discouragement. This is what Haggai means in verse 3 when he says, "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do you see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison as nothing?" The problem was they were looking

in the wrong direction. They also didn't understand that "bigness" does not mean greatness. We have to be careful with this even today. There is a tendency for God's people, especially older believers, to dwell on the past and think about how great things used to be. But the older we get, the bigger and more wonderful the past can become. If we are



not careful, instead of being an encouragement, we can become a discouragement. Remember, the past is not to be an anchor to hold us where we are. It's to be a rudder that moves us toward the future. Again, the people needed to understand what greatness really is.

Next Haggai tells the governor, the high priest, and the people to each "be strong" (cp. 2:4). He then gives them a three-fold encouragement from the Lord to encourage them in the Lord's work. The first encouragement is in the last part of verse 4. The Lord again says, "... I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts." They were to be strong and do God's work because they had the promise of His presence. They also had the promise of His promises. In verse 5 God says, "According to the word that I covenanted with you ..." The third promise was the promise of God's power. We read, "For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth,

and the sea, and the dry land" (2:6). One of these days God is going to shake this heaven and earth, and they will pass away. He is then going to create a new heaven and a new earth. Haggai was encouraging the people to get their eyes on things that cannot be shaken. We need to heed this same counsel today.

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Haggai continues with the Lord's message in verse 7, "And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts." Something was going to happen in the temple the people were rebuilding that was going to be

greater than anything that ever happened in Solomon's temple. Do you remember when Jesus as a 12-year-old boy went to the temple and spent three days talking to the scholars of the day (cp. Lk. 2:48-50)? The temple they were building in Haggai's day was that same temple. It was also the same temple where the Lord Jesus drove out the moneychangers (cp. Lk. 19:45-46). When Jesus entered the temple there was a far greater glory in it than any glory the Jews had ever experienced before. This tells us that greatness is not a place, but it is a Person and that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ. Today, He is what gives greatness to a church and to our lives.

Reflection Connection

According to 2 Peter 1:3-4 what great things do believers have in Jesus Christ? Discuss why these are greater than anything this world can offer.

III. Cleanness (2:10-19)

Haggai's third message came about two months later, which would be December 24 for us. We read, "In the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law,

saying" (2:10-11). Haggai is to go ask the priests some questions concerning the law. The first question is in verse 12, "If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No." In other words, if

sacred meat touched something, since it was holy, would it make whatever it touched holy? The priests answered correctly. They knew that holiness could not be transmitted. The second question is in verse 13: "Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And



the priests answered and said, "It shall be unclean." Again, the priests answered correctly. The priest knew if something unclean touched something clean, what was clean would become unclean.

The people had started the work again and, as a result, were expecting God's material blessings to come, but they had not. This is because God had to teach them a truth about cleanness. The message was we cannot transmit holiness to one another, but we can transmit contamination to another. This is true in every realm of life. Think about it. It is true in the realm of health. We cannot transmit our good health to someone else, but we can transmit our diseases to them or they to us. It is also true in the realm of chemistry. We can take two glasses of water, one filled with dirty water and the other with clean and clear

water. What happens when we pour the filthy water into the clean waters? The polluted water transmits impurity to the clean water. Again, we cannot transmit cleanness, but we can transmit filthiness. This is also true in the moral realm. We cannot transmit holiness to others, but they can transmit uncleanness to us. This is why the Lord says, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate ..." (2 Cor. 6:17).

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Haggai next tells the people, "... So is this people, and so is this nation before Me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean" (2:14). He was saying that it was also true in the spiritual realm. We cannot get clean on the inside by outward ceremony. What did the people need to do? In verses 15 through 19, Haggai again tells them to consider their ways. It wasn't enough for them to just be doing the Lord's work. They needed to be sure they were spiritually clean.

Reflection Connection

Read 2 Timothy 2:20-22 and discuss what it is important for us to be spiritually clean today if we want to be used by the Lord.

IV. Faithfulness (2:20-23)

Haggai's fourth message was delivered on the same day as his third, December 24, but it was delivered personally to the people's leader, Zerubbabel (2:20-23). Keep in mind that Zerubbabel was the governor of a little remnant of people. He was trying to lead them in doing the work of the Lord, but he had encountered opposition on the outside and discouragement from the inside. Now God sends him a message to encourage and challenge him to faithfulness.

He tells Zerubbabel to be faithful because he will see His power. The Lord repeats that He is going to shake the heavens and the earth. Just as Zerubbabel was exhorted to be faithful, we should be faithful when we are doing God's work, knowing He will provide the power to do His work. We don't have to do the work of the Lord in our own strength. In fact, it is dangerous to do so!

God says in verse 23 that He

will make a signet ring out of Zerubbabel. What was He saying? The king would have a ring that he would wear around his neck or on his hand. After a document had been composed, the king would then imprint his signet ring in the document, putting his authority and power behind the commitments in the document. The Lord was telling Zerubbabel that He had given him the work he was doing. This meant he had God's authority and power behind his leadership.



Zerubbabel was also like a pre-picture of the Lord Jesus. In fact, did you know that Zerubbabel is mentioned in the genealogy of the Lord (cp. Matt. 1:12)? We know the Lord Jesus is God's beloved Son (cp. Mt. 3:17; Jn. 3:16). Because of this we could rightly say Jesus is God's "signet ring." When Christ saves us and

puts His stamp or seal on our life, He is telling us how special we are. We have been chosen by Him. Zerubbabel also needed to understand how special he was. God had chosen him for His work. This meant he didn't need to be discouraged in the work, but he could faithfully do the work God had given him to do.

Reflection Connection

Read Hebrews 10:23 and discuss why we can be faithful in doing the Lord's work today. How is this promise similar to the promise given Zerubbabel?

Wrap Up

Did you note how often Haggai told his readers to "consider" their lives? He was saying they needed to take a good look at their lives. This is what we also need to do. Are our priorities right or have we been living selfishly? Have we fallen for the world's definition of greatness instead of realizing the greatest possession we have is our salvation and living for the Lord should be our greatest desire? Are we living clean lives so we can be vessels of honor or do we have to admit that we are more like a vessel of dishonor? No matter the opposition from without or discouragement from within, are we committed to being faithful to the Lord? Let's take a good look at our lives and be encouraged by the truths Haggai gave his readers. First, the Lord is with us (cp. 2:4; cp. Heb. 13:5). He is the One who blesses us (2:19; cp. Eph. 1:3); and we are His chosen people (2:23; cp. Eph. 1:4). Again, let's take a good look at our lives so we can keep on keeping on for the Lord!

