

HAGGAI



GENESIS CHURCH SERMON STUDY GUIDE
JANUARY, 2016

The New Year always brings a time of rebooting and evaluation. As January 1 comes each of us will hear people wishing us a happy New Year and prosperous 2016. Of course, we are all hoping that the coming year will be terrific, but what if you were able to gain all the prosperity you wanted in your life, while at the same time found yourself in a state of poverty of soul. Would you make that trade. Sadly, as the people of God who should have our lives centered on Him, we often drift from zeal for the Lord toward busyness, apathy, and self-pleasing. The Old Testament book of Haggai addresses God's people during a time when they had drifted from the zeal for God's purpose.

No, Haggai is not some secret code word meaning "Happy New Year. Actually it is the name of an Old Testament Prophet. He was sent to speak for God to His people, and his message came at a time when the Hebrew people were stuck. Life was hard, they were so busy taking care of daily challenges and struggles, and it took all they could muster to keep their heads above water. But in the midst of the grind they had drifted from the priority God had given them. God had given them the commission to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, and the foundation had been laid, but the work came to a stand still as people got busy with life. Haggai is a short book to people in a specific situation, but it will be a great study for us in January because this prophet helps us remember to put first things first, and reminds us that the blessings we have in life come as we prioritize worship.

Author

Like most prophetic books, the title of the book is also the name of the prophet. Not much is known about Haggai outside of his preaching at the time of the book. His name is mentioned eleven times in two places. First, Haggai's name is mentioned nine times within this book. Second, he is mentioned with the historical accounts of the event that coincide with his preaching in Ezra 5-6, with both of these references informing us that Haggai prophesied alongside of Zechariah, and that their preaching was an encouragement that helped prosper the lives of the people during the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem from 520-515 BC. His name means "festal", possibly a reference that he was born during one of the Hebrews great feasts. Beyond this, anything that has been espoused about Haggai is speculation. What we do know is that he was a prophet sent by God with the Word of the Lord during the Post-Exilic period of Hebrew history, with all of the prophecies in this book coming in 520 BC.

Background

Haggai was written during the Post-Exilic period of Hebrew history. This is a reference to the period between 535-444 BC, after the Babylonian Exile, during the rule of the Persian Empire. It was a time where Jews returned from Babylonian captivity to the land called Palestine and restoration of the city of Jerusalem.

Babylonian Exile

The Babylonian Exile was the result of disobedience, idolatry, and rejection of mission. The result was that the Hebrew people were conquered, taken captive, and lived as exiles for 70 years. They were taken from their homeland and forced to serve a foreign king. Babylon conquered Judah and Jerusalem for the first time in 605 BC, and deported the best and brightest of Israel. After two attempts to overthrow Babylonian rule which were followed by subsequent conquests Babylon utterly destroyed Jerusalem including

the Temple in 585 BC. At this time all people were either deported, killed, or sent into the barren countryside to farm the land. For seventy years God's people lived in Babylon (see the books of Daniel and Ezekiel for this story). But in all this time they had prophecies of restoration and return. Well before the Babylonian Captivity God sent prophets to warn the people and tell them of this impending judgment. These prophecies also showed God's sovereignty over nations, proving that Babylon was nothing more than a pawn in His hands within the scope of history. God was disciplining His people in love, bringing them back to Him for the second time. This is our lives. The Hebrews people had been given redemption in the Exodus. Now they had a renewed redemption as God burned the sin and rebellion that kept them from experiencing His grace and blessing.

Restoration and Return

The Babylonian Empire ended when Babylon was conquered by the Persians and their ruler Cyrus the Persian. Starting with the Edict of Cyrus, the Hebrew people are released from captivity and allowed to return home.. Isaiah prophesied Cyrus by name 200 years before He was born, and declared that He would rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. The first wave of people left in 538 BC and is told in Ezra 1-2. The truth is that the amount of people willing to return was very small compared to the number of Jews in Babylon. But God is continuing to tell His story through this remnant. They get to Jerusalem and start rebuilding the city and Temple, but opposition arose and the building of the Temple stalled. The people were led by two key leaders at this time, Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua the High Priest. Zerubbabel was the grandson of Jehoiachin, the last King of Judah, and therefore the last Davidic king. This means Zerubbabel was in the line of David, and the heir apparent to the throne. Although he is not a king, only a governor, he will function as the key political leader of the Hebrews. Joshua was born in the priestly line, a descendant of Aaron and a Levite. As High Priest, he was the key religious leader at the time of the rebuild. The opening lines of Haggai tell us that the prophets words were first to these two leaders, but by extension to all the people. The period of restoration is a picture of God's dealings with His people. We may have times of straying and struggle, but God's purpose is to bring restoration and return us into a right relationship with Himself.

Importance of the Temple

To understand the message of Haggai we must understand the importance of the Temple. It is so much more than a church building. The story of the Temple begins in the book of Exodus with the construction of the Tabernacle. This Tent of Meeting is the place where God meets His people. His presence and glory are on full display in the Holy of Holies, and He reveals Himself as they come to Him at the tent. He is not contained in the Tent, but God gives them this location as a gift so they can know the requirements for approaching Him in worship. In other words, the transcendent God has chosen to give them a place where He will come near to His people, and they can know Him. They must first have their sin atoned, so the Tabernacle is also the place of sacrifice. In the sacrifices God offers forgiveness, as he paints a picture of the deep cost of their sin and the deep cost of forgiveness. The Temple becomes a permanent replacement for the Tabernacle as it is built in Jerusalem which becomes the central city in Jewish life, as both the religious and political capital. The First Temple is built by King Solomon 957 BC. This Temple was built during a time of prosperity and power for the

Kingdom of Israel, and was therefore glorious in construction, a beautiful place that was a wonder in the ancient world. But as amazing as it was, Solomon built a palace that was even better, showing where his true zeal lied. Solomon's Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians when they destroyed Jerusalem. Haggai addresses the building of the second Temple, which began about 15 years before his writing, but was left unfinished. Upon returning to Jerusalem the people set up the altar for sacrifice, and they laid the foundation of the Temple, but this is where the work stopped. The combination of opposition from people outside of Jerusalem and their own desires to get their houses built and businesses started caused the people to neglect the completion of the Temple. This seems reasonable, people need to build their own houses and feed their families. But the issue here is that this was not an either/or choice. Over the years they had drifted away from lives centered on God and His redemptive purpose and toward self-sufficiency and accomplishment. There is nothing magic about the Temple, but for the Hebrews it represented the call for God to be central in their lives and the need to draw near to Him as He drew near to them. Failure to rebuild was a sign that they valued their own success more than the blessing of God, and their own path over an intimate redemptive relationship with their Creator.

The Word of the Lord comes to Haggai primarily to challenge God's people to make this a priority so that the place of God's presence will be built, leading to the Hebrews worship and repentance. The work begins (as we will see in Haggai) right after Haggai preaches, the people obey God's Word, and it is completed five years later. But the completion of this Temple happens in a time of oppression and struggle so it is a shell of the former Temple, and as a result the people mourn for the loss of glory. This will be one of the themes here in Haggai, as he tells them that the glory that will fill this Temple is greater than the glory of the previous Temple. The reason for this is that one day the Messiah will come to this Temple. The Second Temple went through a massive renovation and upgrade during the reign of Herod the Great (he was the guy who tried to kill Jesus in Bethlehem), but in the inside it is the same Temple that is built here at the time of Haggai.

The Temple was destroyed again in 70 AD by the Romans, but before this something significant happened, the cross of Christ. The New Testament makes it clear that the real purpose of the Temple was to create images of atonement and redemption that were fulfilled in Jesus. The Temple is the place where God met people, now Jesus is that place as He came to us. The Temple was the place where sacrifices were made to atone for sins, Jesus was the final sacrifice dying for our forgiveness. Jesus is the True and Better Temple. But the New Testament Temple imagery goes beyond this. We no longer need a building as the place of God's presence, Christ dwells within us. We are the Temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19-20).

The Prophets

Prophets were God's messengers, sent by Him to speak on His behalf. The most common phrases from their lips are "Thus saith the Lord", and "The Word of the Lord", emphasizing the reality that their words are not really their own, they are the very words of God. The prophets speak the Word of the Lord in specific times and contexts, to kings, leaders, and the people who live at their time. So the key to understanding the prophets is to figure out their context and location. Haggai is a Post-Exilic prophet, meaning he was sent by God to the Hebrew people during the period after the

Babylonian Exile. To be recognized as a prophet a person had to have two things that were clear in their lives. First, they were known to speak the Word of the Lord in the form of prophetic predictions, and those predictions consistently came true. In fact, if a prophet missed one prediction, ever, he or she was to be rejected as a prophet from then on. Second, they had to consistently point God's people to Yahweh, the One True God revealed in the Scriptures. These two tests gave clear evidence that the prophet was sent by God and that His words were the very words of God Himself. Their speech was to be obeyed as if God Himself had spoken, because, in fact, He had. Only those who have a life record of consistently speaking for God and having their words affirmed by these two tests would be considered a true prophet. No prophet gets a book unless they have a life record of being a faithful prophet. The truth is that we don't know a whole lot about Haggai other than the fact that he was a prophet. His ministry is spoken of in Ezra 5-6, confirming the message he preached in this book. We may not know much, but the people at the time of Haggai knew him and recognized him as a prophet, and they received his message as the very word of the One True God. When the people didn't like the message of the prophets they would reject them and persecute them, and also they would replace them with a prophet that they liked, a false prophet who would affirm them in the name of the Lord. Haggai is one of the exceptions to this story, as the people listen to the Word of the Lord, obey God and rebuild the Temple.

Text of Haggai and Sermon Themes

The prophecies on Haggai are actually attributed to specific dates in history. In other words, we know the exact dates of the sermons proclaimed and events of the book. The book contains four prophetic words and one section that shows the people's obedient response to Haggai's prophecy as they begin the work rebuilding the Temple. This gives us five sermons.

Sermon 1, January 10 - *First Things First* (Haggai 1:1-11)

*Message 1 – August 29, 520 BC

Message to 520 BC - Haggai speaks to the leaders, but by extension to the people about their failure to obey God and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. They are declaring that the time for this sort of project has not come. Life is hard, and they have so much to do, and the opposition to this sort of project is significant. Yet, they have worked hard to build really nice houses for themselves. But Haggai chastises them for failing to put the worship of God first in their lives. He tells them that there is a fruitlessness and hunger in their lives because God is not blessing their efforts. They are like people who are earn wages but put their money in a purse that has a hole in the bottom, the money just falls out. God has chosen to send a famine to get the people's attention, and then by his grace has sent a prophet to declare His Word. The remedy is to put God back in the proper position of priority and to gather together to finish the work and rebuild the Temple, which also restores the place of worship, God's presence, and atonement.

Message to AD 2016 – A New Year is a natural time to examine priorities in life. And we, like the Hebrews will often structure our lives to make sure our needs are met, our goals are pursued, our desires are fulfilled. But without the blessing of God we will find these things hollow and fruitless. God may give us over to the desires of our hearts,

letting us have what we wish, but we will find out that these things are like the purse with the hole. Or God may remove the things we tend to put first in our lives, showing their idolatrous place and leaving us angry with God and empty because they have lost their true god. Either way, the solution is to return to the proper worship of God and put Him in the proper place in our lives. Are we like the Hebrews who are building their own homes, making them nice and beautiful, but leaving the unfinished walls of the Temple untended. These walls become an accusation against us. The call here is to rebuild the walls of the Temple. This is done by re-engaging the disciplines, a focus on the community, and a renewed value in the cross of Christ. If we want to live in the blessing of God the pathway to that is to prioritize the things in our lives that draw us near to Him and experience His glory in our lives.

Sermon 2, January 17 - *The Voice* (Haggai 1:12-15)

*Events on September 21, 520 BC

***Message to 520 BC** - The people hear the word of the Lord, they fear the Lord, and they obey. The effort is led by Zerubbabel who is the political leader and Joshua who is the High Priest or religious leader, but it also includes all of the remnant, the Hebrews who are in Judah. The key passage here is that all the people obeyed the voice of the Lord and they feared the Lord. This led to action, they put their work clothes on and started building. They invested the resources needed to make the project happen. The promise is that God will be present with them and faithful. We are told that the Spirit of the Lord stirred up their spirits. A great phrase that shows our part and God's part. Our part is to obey and work. God's part is that He empowered them and became the motivation to make it through hard days. They would need this empowerment because Ezra 5-6 tells us that opposition would come. But God demonstrates His sovereign power as He directs the heart of Darius, the King of the Persian Empire to allow and even fund the building of the Temple.

***Message to AD 2016** - What is God saying to you? To discover this we must begin with the clear teaching of Scripture. Are there things that the Bible clearly teaches us that you are tending to suppress or renegotiate so that you can actually live your lives the way you wish? Beyond that, how is God directing your life. Are we moving toward obedience in our character, life mission, generosity, justice? Our part is always repentance, faith, and obedience. God's part is that He blesses this in our lives with His presence, power, and grace. We don't earn this, but we partner with the grace of God in our sanctification.

Sermon 3, January 24 - *Spelling SUCCESS* (Haggai 2:1-9)

*Message 2 on October 17, 520 BC

***Message to 520 BC** - It had been close to 70 years since Solomon's Temple had been destroyed in 586 BC. This Temple was overlaid with gold, a spectacle that could be seen far away. It had the manifest presence in the Shekinah glory of God, and it had the Ark of the Covenant. The New Temple was nothing compared to the previous. The Ark was gone, and nobody has found it sense (not even Indiana Jones). The gold was replaced with simple walls of stone. The size of the exterior court was smaller and less beautiful by far. Some who are involved in the building had faint memories of the Temple they had

seen when they were children. Others heard stories from parents and grandparents. Their efforts felt so lacking, and seemed to be so short in glory compared to the previous. The lack of beauty and luster had to be a sign of their failure and God's displeasure. But Haggai tells the people just the opposite. Rather, God gives a promise that He is with them in their efforts as they remain faithful. Beyond this, God gives the promise that the glory of this Temple will far exceed the glory of the First Temple, and that from this Temple God will shake the nations and draw them to himself, show His glory and give peace. How can this be? The answer is that this will be the Temple that Christ Himself will enter. The Shikinah glory will not be an intangible presence, but will rather be a person who is present.

Message to AD 2016 - What is the measurement of success for us? If we define success in life and blessing by the tangibles, IE, health, houses, retirement accounts, etc., then we will always find that our lives do not measure up to something. Or maybe we are measuring our lives by the quality of our works, believing that our acceptance before God is based on our performance. We are driven to look at the things we can see and measure. But the measure of success God uses is faithfulness. This is why a widow with the smallest coin entering this Temple will be shown as the most true in Israel. Just like the people did not realize they were building the Temple in preparation for the Messiah, we do not know how God intends to use our faithfulness in generations to come. But the outcome of faithfulness is always legacy.

Sermon 4, January 31 - On Purpose (Haggai 2:10-19)

*Message 3 on December 18, 520 BC

>It has been 3 months since the renewal began, the planting season has ended and they are looking to the Spring harvest

Message to 520 BC – Haggai challenges the people to stop and think about their lives and situation. They are about three months into renewed building project and it seems that they may already be waning from the zeal to accomplish the work. But beyond this, their own lives are wrought with sin and unholiness, and they are not experience the benefits of being God's people. Haggai begins this message by encouraging the people to ask the priests to scour the Law and answer two questions about being ceremonial clean and unclean. While the basis of the questions is bizarre to us, the central gist is this. We do not become holy by association, but we can become unclean in this way. In other words, there is no unintentional path toward godliness and blessing, but the path to uncleanness and rejection is full of unintentional pathways. With this in mind, Haggai tells the people to consider several things. First, they are to consider how they have fared up to this point (v. 15). They are to look back on their lives and realize that the drift from God has led to barren lives and barren grain bins. This happened because God in His grace has disciplined His children and struck them with scarcity, which should have led them to prayer and restoration, but they did not return. So now there is the call to consider the path forward. He draws a line in the sand, from this day on... There is a call to evaluate where they want to be, and this comes with the promise that God is going to give grace and bless them in spite of their failures.

Message to AD 2016 - There is not such thing as accidental Gospel application. We will

default to the lowest common denominator in our relationships, habits, activities, and idols. If we are left to ourselves the outcome is never natural pathways to holiness and mission. Being a disciple means that we are constantly evaluating ourselves and the journey. It includes looking back and being honest about life. If we are blessed, every blessing is because of God's goodness and grace. If we have struggles and a fruitlessness in life it is a reminder that we should seek God and trust in Him. He is not far from us. And as we look forward we need to be intentional about the goals that we have the direction we will take. And we must remember that the most important evaluation and goal setting is in our walk with God, our understanding of the atonement, and our appropriation of the Gospel.

Sermon 5, February 7 – The Right Side of History (Haggai 2:20-23)

*Message 4 on December 18, 520 BC, the same day as the previous message

Message to 520 BC - Haggai has one final message, but his final word looks way beyond the building of the Temple to the entire promise filled scope of the Biblical story. This text is a reminder to us that every individual story of the Bible is set in the larger grand narrative and under the themes of creation, fall, redemption, restoration. Here God speaks through the prophet to Zerubbabel, the current kingly leader of the Jews. He is not a king per say, since they are actually ruled by the Persian emperor, but he is functioning in this role, and more importantly, Zerubbabel is a Davidic descendant, which puts him in the kingly line, and also the line of the Messiah (as told by both New Testament genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3). The message to Zerubbabel has two key promises. The first is the shaking of all that is shakable, specifically the kingdoms of this world. God will act in a decisive way in history bringing justice and restoring all this is wrong. The second message is a promise to Zerubbabel that the blessing of God as King will flow through Zerubbabel, which is a continuation of the promises God made to David about the nature of the Kingdom of God. So in this passage the Kingdom of God is set against the kingdoms of the world. The rebuilding of the Temple is a moment in this story, but God has already orchestrated the end and the promises of God are sure. But these people stand in a key moment of that story. So the people should respond and build because they have their place in the end in mind.

Message to AD 2016 - There has been a lot of talk recently about finding ourselves on the right side of history in certain issues. We feel the pull of the moment, the need to be relevant, and to fit in at this juncture in history. But the Gospel call is always to see our lives as happening in a moment that is set in eternity, and to keep the final days in view. This means that God will be true to His promises, and those include the shaking of the nations in judgment, but also the faithfulness in His people as He makes them his signet ring, and be a blessing to the nations. This promise still stands, and it is because of the God's sending a descendant of David. We too have our moment in history, and it includes the call to stay true to the Scriptures and proclaim the Gospel to the nations.