



For February 7th, 2010

Midlothian Bible Church

Life In Focus

Examining Life Through the Lens of Scripture

Minor Prophets

Haggai



The human heart is deceptively wicked yet somewhat consistent in its behavior, so it is not too alarming when history repeats the actions of previous generations. The heart's expression may vary from era to era, but at the core, without the rule of the Spirit, it remains the same – self-centered. If anyone had opportunity to

break this cycle it would have been Israel. Not only could they learn from the negative example of forefathers who walked away from God, but they, as his chosen people, also had his never failing love. In this mercy, God dealt with Israel through forgiveness when they repented and judgment when they went astray. Yet despite this sovereign blend of compassion and discipline, Israel never totally got it. Their heart continued to spurn God's love spiraling them deeper into judgment. As a result, the kingdom divided under Jeroboam and Rehoboam in 931 B.C., and God allowed Israel, the northern kingdom, to be taken into captivity in 722 B.C. by the Assyrians. Yet Judah, the southern kingdom, experienced mercy when good king Hezekiah, under the threat of the mocking Assyrian army, bowed in humility before God. God defeated their enemy and Judah lived in relative peace for about 100 years. Yet during this time, as their heart turned again away from God, Babylon overthrew Assyria and became the tool through which, as the prophet Habbakuk will later tell us, God punished Judah. In three deportations of 605, 597, and 586 B.C., during the ministry of Jeremiah, Babylon, under King Nebuchadnezzar, ransacked Jerusalem taking captive the chosen, disobedient children of God. Yet a remnant of people, like Daniel, sought God through the promises of the prophets and longed for the day when God would restore their glory and bring them home. 70 years later, just after Persia defeated Babylon and became the new world power, the word of the LORD spoken through Jeremiah came true. God's people, under the leadership of Zerubbabel started home. Sixteen years later, after the work on the temple faltered, God raised up the prophet Haggai to challenge his people and us to give him, the desire of nations, first place.

MBC Mission Statement:

Building God's family by developing intimate followers of Jesus Christ.

Grow Mature Reproducing Disciples

Raise Christ-centered Families

Adore the Triune God

Communicate Him to our Culture

Express our Faith Globally

Life In Focus © is a weekly ministry serving Midlothian Bible Church 4250 FM 663 P.O. Box 512 Midlothian, TX. 76065 972-723-0002 Phone. 972-723-0723 Fax

For information or to have L.I.F. emailed to you weekly, please contact Layne at Ext.11 or via email mersh@att.net

Day One

Background

Digging Deeper



- o **Believe it or not:** Ezra and Nehemiah were combined as one work in the earliest Hebrew manuscripts. It was probably compiled after the events of Nehemiah in 426 B.C.

Scripture Memory

Haggai 2:46-5

“...Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the LORD. Work, for I am with you, declares the LORD of hosts, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not.”

English Standard Version

It is important to hide God’s Word in our heart. Each week we will provide a section of verses you can use to enjoy this benefit.

Tips:

1. Use a familiar, reader-friendly version.
2. Write the vs. on a 3x5 card. Carry it with you.
3. Repetition is key.
4. Focus on content.

♦ Introduction:

↪ Our study this week will focus on the ministry of the prophet Haggai who preached to those who first returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel. The chart below will help structure the timeline of historical events, but in order to gain a fuller understanding of the setting of Haggai, we need to get familiar with a few books that, because of their placement in the OT, are often forgotten when studying the minor prophets.

Date: B.C.	Event:	Reference:
605, 597, 586	Three deportations to Babylon and the fall of Judah.	2 Kings 24-25
538	1st Return under <i>Zerubbabel</i> , with the blessing of Cyrus king of Persia, to rebuild the temple.	Ezra 1-6
520	<i>Haggai</i> prophesies to restart building the temple.	<i>Haggai</i>
520-515	Zechariah prophesies.	Zechariah
516	Temple completed and dedicated.	Ezra 6:13-22
483-473	Esther preserves her people.	Esther
458	2nd Return under <i>Ezra</i> to restore spiritual condition of the people.	Ezra 7-10
444	3rd Return under <i>Nehemiah</i> to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem	Nehemiah 1-7
	Revival of the people	Nehemiah 8-12
426	Nehemiah’s Second Return and final reforms	Nehemiah 13
	Ministry of Malachi, a contemporary of Nehemiah, the last prophet of the OT era.	Malachi

♦ Study: Read *Ezra 1, 3:1 - 6:12*.

↪ Use the back to write your answers. Who gave them permission to rebuild? Why did the work on the temple stop? How would you answer the question in 5:3? Who was to pay for the work?

♦ Reflect:

↪ After the temple was complete, God used Esther to preserve his people still left in captivity. Later, he used Ezra to restore the spiritual condition of his people. What three things from Ezra 7:10 determined Ezra’s success in achieving God’s plan for his life? Why is each one equally important for your life?

Day Two

Consider Your Ways!

Digging
Deeper



- **Additional Questions:** The background of the book of Ezra, let alone the books of Esther and Nehemiah, provide strategic details in understanding the books of Haggai and Zechariah. But let's go back to Ezra and look at a few more questions related to the question posed by Tattenai in Ezra 5:3.
 - ▶ *How did Tattenai describe the work that restarted under the ministry of Haggai? (v.8).*
 - ▶ *How did the people of God answer Tattenai's questions of who they were and who gave them permission to continue the project? (vv.11ff). What is significant about their answer?*

◆ **Introduction:**

↪ Sometimes we don't see the error of our ways until someone confronts us with it. Even then, we tend to justify and qualify decisions or behavior to the point where we never truly hear and heed the warning. In our story today, the people of Israel who returned with Zerubbabel decided that it wasn't a good time to rebuild the house of the LORD (1:2) and God took umbrage with it. Time had passed, priorities waned, and God, through the prophet Haggai, had them consider their ways.

◆ **Study: Read *Haggai 1:1-11*.**

↪ Despite the blessing of king Cyrus to begin rebuilding the temple, the work stopped not long after it began. Reread Ezra 4 and try to determine why this happened.

↪ Using yesterday's chart or a study Bible, how much time passed by from the time the work stopped until the ministry of Haggai? What tends to happen after time? How did this affect the people? What did they focus on instead of the temple?

↪ Describe what happened to the people as a result of neglecting the work on the temple. How did God get their attention? How has he used consequence in your life to get your attention?

◆ **Reflect:**

↪ How critical is v.9 to understanding why God allowed their work at home and in the land to be futile? What does their focus on their homes instead of the temple reveal about them? What does God's response to it reveal about him? Where are you most like the people? Where have you neglected God?

Day Three

The People's Response

Digging
Deeper



- **Remnant:** Haggai referred to the people as a *remnant* (here and also in v.14 and in 2:2), not merely because they were survivors of the Babylonian Exile but also because they were becoming what the remnant of God's people should always be—those who are obedient within their covenant relationship to the Lord (cf. Isaiah 10:21). (Bible Knowledge Com).
- **Obedience:** “As they humbly obeyed God's word and started work, God helped them. We have a role in bringing about the blessing of God by choosing to act in submission to God's will (2 Tim. 1:6–7). In Hebrew, the words *messenger* and *work* are similar. Their use close together here reminds us that a prophecy is not a ‘blessing’ to be pleased about, but an instruction that should lead to action.” (New Bible Commentary).

◆ **Introduction:**

✦ Even with the outside pressure of adversaries and the decree of King Artaxerxes to stop the work on the temple (Ezra 4), God held the people responsible. Because of their failure, their work yielded little result. Nothing seemed to grow very well and they could never seem to get full when they ate. When they drank, they remained thirsty and when they clothed themselves they remained cold. Even when they tried to save their money, it disappeared like a purse full of holes. Fear of the decree mixed with the passing years of not doing what they were supposed to do led to lethargy and the struggling grind of life. Yet, in his faithfulness, God brought the prophet Haggai to the people and challenged them to consider their ways and respond in obedience. And much to the reader's surprise, they did.

◆ **Study:** Read *Haggai 1:12-15*.

✦ Who led the people in their response to the words of Haggai? (v.12). What does this reveal about the type of man he was?

✦ Who are the *remnant* that are mentioned in v.12? What two key words describe the action the people had in their response to what Haggai had to say? (v.12). Why is this significant?

✦ What comfort did the people take in v.13? What is possible when God is on your side? How does *Hebrews 13:5* challenge us as New Testament believers? Where do you seek contentment? In things or in the presence of God?

◆ **Reflect:**

✦ Vv. 14 and 15 says that the LORD stirred up the spirit of the leaders and the people to accomplish the task laid out before them. What does this indicate about our source of strength? Is your heart tuned toward obedience or complacency? Where do you need to be encouraged in your walk with God?

Day Four

The Presence of God

Digging
Deeper



o **Messiah:** As people who look back to the words of the prophets through the lens of the Cross, we have to ask ourselves the primary question when studying the minor prophets—*How does what I'm studying point me to Christ?* In today's passage, we find the phrase the "Desire of All Nations." In this descriptor, we believe that Haggai is referring to the Messiah who will come at the end of history to set up his kingdom. "He is the 'desired One' par excellence, the most precious of all prized possessions or persons...The most sought-after Person of all persons is also the one to whom all 'desirable items' and 'wealth' will flow in that day, for everything that is valuable, prized, and precious belongs to him as Lord, creator, and owner of all things (Psalm 24:1)." (*The Messiah in the Old Testament*. Walter C. Kaiser Jr, p.208.)

◆ **Introduction:**

↗ Few words invoke more significance to the people of Israel than the comforting, sustaining, motivating words of God when he, in dealing with humble obedient children, declares, "*Be strong...for I am with you.*" There is nothing that matters more in life than to know that the presence of God is with you. Moses refused to take another step toward the Promised Land until he knew that God would go with them (Exodus 34). In correction and restoration, the thing David feared the most was that God would take his Spirit from him (Psalm 51). We can muddle through the Christian life knowing the right words or argument for what we believe and convince most people that we are right with God. But until we humbly bring to God all that we are in all of our deceitfulness and weakness and lay ourselves at his feet in yielded exhaustion, then we will never know the complete joy and power of God's presence. In the promise of his presence, we find a hope to which nothing can compare: Keep working. Stay strong. Don't give up for the Desire of All Nations will soon come.

◆ **Study:** Read *Haggai 2:1-9*.

↗ Haggai's second word from God comes in 2:1. What does this message have to say to the leaders and the remnant?

↗ What do you think is the reason behind the questions in v.3? Go back and compare this with the people's response to the ruin of the temple in Ezra 3:12. Do you see remorse? Why? What does God promise to provide to them in vv.4-5?

↗ What does the term "shake" suggest about the plan of God? What does he promise about the glory of the temple? What would the promised peace (v.9) replace?

◆ **Reflect:**

↗ What does the temple signify about the presence of God? How should New Testament believers understand the presence of God? What *fear* does the peace of God need to replace in your life? How much do you desire this "Desire of All Nations"?

Day Five

The Blessing

Digging
Deeper



- **Temple:** This played a key role in the life of Israel. “It served as both the place of God’s special presence...and the place of proper worship.”
- **Dates:** “The specific days and dates given for these oracles are worth noting. The *first* is...at the time of the full maturing of the grain; the *second*, comes at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles (Israel’s harvest festival); the *third* and *fourth* during the growing season for spring harvest. All of these were periods when people had no excuse that they were too busy to pay attention to the temple.” (Fee & Stuart, pp.253-54).

Life In Focus © is a weekly sermon-based ministry serving Midlothian Bible Church and is written by Layne A. Mershimer (mersh@att.net), Pastor of Adult Ministries. Learning takes place in the context of community, so we encourage you to interact with the lesson and send your questions. Our prayer is that L.I.F. will help you grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

◆ **Introduction:**

- ↪ Over the course of four months, God spoke to his people struggling to rebuild the ruins of the temple in Jerusalem through the prophet Haggai four different times. Each of these oracles were meant to challenge and encourage both the leader Zerubbabel and the remnant. In fact, Fee and Stuart, in *How To Read the Bible Book by Book*, note a “clear correspondence between the first [1:1-11] and third [2:10-19] (the covenant curse is now to be overturned by covenant blessing) and between the second [2:1-9] and fourth [2:20-23] (encouraging Zerubbabel as leader).” In today’s study, we find that obedience produces blessing and restores what the curse of disobedience brings (cf. Deut.28).

◆ **Study: Read *Haggai 2:10-23*.**

- ↪ What is the purpose of vv.10-14?
- ↪ How does God turn what has been a curse into a blessing? (vv.15-19). What do we learn about repentance and returning to God versus resistance and running from God?
- ↪ What political significance does the “shaking” involve in vv.21-22? How would this encourage Zerubbabel?
- ↪ God promises to make Zerubbabel like a signet ring. This imagery signifies “his value to God as well as the authority to carry out his will.” How does the New Testament describe the seal God has placed on your life?

◆ **Reflect:**

- ↪ Someone said, “God delights in those who obey him, and loves to be close to them, but he withdraws his blessing from the disobedient.” Which are you? Pray for God to give you purpose and blessing for life. Be sure to listen for what he asks of you.