

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

12-12-18

Overview Book of Haggai

Pressures, demands, expectations, and tasks push in from all sides and assault our schedules. Do this! Be there! Finish that! Call them! Everyone seems to want something from us—family, friends, employer, school, church, clubs. Soon we have little left to give as we run out of energy and time. We find ourselves rushing through life, attending to the necessary, the immediate, and the urgent. The important is all too often left in the dust. Our problem is not the volume of demands or lack of scheduling skills, but values—what is truly important to us.

Our values and priorities are reflected in how we use our resources—time, money, strength, and talent. Often our actions belie our words. We say God is number one, but then we relegate him to a lesser number on our “to do” lists.

Twenty-five centuries ago, a voice was heard, calling men and women to the right priorities. Haggai knew what was important and what had to be done, and he challenged God’s people to respond.

In 586 B.C., the armies of Babylon had destroyed the temple in Jerusalem—God’s house, the symbol of his presence. In 538 B.C. King Cyrus decreed that Jews could return to their beloved city and rebuild the temple. So they traveled to Jerusalem and began the work. But then they forgot their purpose and lost their priorities, as opposition and apathy brought the work to a standstill (Ezra 4:4-5). Then Haggai spoke, calling them back to God’s values: “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?” (1:4). The people were more concerned with their own needs than with doing God’s will, and, as a result, they suffered. Then Haggai called them to action: “This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,’ says the LORD” (1:7-8). And God’s message through his servant Haggai became the catalyst for finishing the work.

Although Haggai is a small book, it is filled with challenge and promise, reminding us of God’s claim on our lives and our priorities. As you read Haggai, imagine him walking the streets and alleys of Jerusalem, urging the people to get back to doing God’s work. And listen to Haggai speaking to you, urging you to reorder your priorities in accordance with God’s will. What has God told you to do? Put all else aside and obey him.

VITAL STATISTICS

PURPOSE: To call the people to complete the rebuilding of the temple

AUTHOR: Haggai

ORIGINAL AUDIENCE: The people living in Jerusalem and those who had returned from exile

DATE WRITTEN: 520 B.C.

SETTING: The temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed in 586 B.C. Cyrus had allowed the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild their temple in 538 B.C. They had begun the work but had been unable to complete it. Through the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah, the temple was completed (520-516 B.C.).

KEY VERSE: "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" (1:4).

KEY PEOPLE: Haggai, Zerubbabel, Joshua

KEY PLACE: Jerusalem

SPECIAL FEATURES: Haggai was the first of the postexilic prophets. The other two were Zechariah and Malachi. The literary style of this book is simple and direct.

THE BLUEPRINT

1. The call to rebuild the temple (1:1-15)
2. Encouragement to complete the temple (2:1-23)

When the exiles first returned from Babylon, they set about rebuilding the temple right away. Although they began with the right attitudes, they slipped back into wrong behavior, and the work came to a standstill. We need to be on guard to keep our priorities straight. Remain active in your service to God and continue to put first things first.

MEGATHEMES

Right Priorities

EXPLANATION: God had given the Jews the assignment to finish the temple in Jerusalem when they returned from captivity. After 15 years, they still had not completed it. They were more concerned about building their own homes than finishing God's work. Haggai told them to get their priorities straight.

IMPORTANCE: It is easy to make other priorities more important than doing God's work. But God wants us to follow through and build up his Kingdom. Don't stop and don't make excuses. Set your heart on what is right and do it. Get your priorities straight.

God's Encouragement

EXPLANATION: Haggai encouraged the people as they worked. He assured them of the divine presence of the Holy Spirit and of final victory, and instilled in them the hope that the Messiah would reign.

IMPORTANCE: If God gives you a task, don't be afraid to get started. His resources are infinite. God will help you complete it by giving you encouragement from others along the way.