

ABIDE

DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



SNAP OUT OF IT

HAGGAI

Now here is an exciting story! The name Haggai means, “My Feasts” and he certainly lived up to his name. By his message, God used this man to give God’s people a feast of encouragement during very discouraging times.

The time of Haggai occurred after that time when the priest Ezra, along with 50,000 people were released from Babylonian captivity in 536 B.C. When we touched on this subject in the Historical Portion of the Old Testament, the people were excited, a wall was built, and then, they had it in their mind to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed. Well, if there is one thing you should know, it is that if you start a work for God, you need to expect a fight. And that is exactly what happened to these people. They were going to do a great work for God, but they ended up with the greatest fight in their life so, they just stopped. In fact, what was so sad about the whole event was that they only got as far as the foundation and never touched it again. For fifteen to sixteen years that foundation lay there collecting dirt, becoming overrun with weeds, and a continual scourge every time someone walked by it. What once was looked upon as a symbol of a new beginning was now a reminder of failure.

Because of this, there was a spirit of indifference and pessimism that could be felt and sensed in the cultural atmosphere. Furthermore, there was some poor end-time interpretation going on because of this seemingly defeated project. Some of those looking at the destruction pointed to a teaching that said there would be no reason to continue the work because they were destined to continue living the “Desolation of Jerusalem.” And sadly, this is what comes naturally for us during some of the failures we face. It is an excuse masked in righteous explanation. That is what these ‘critics of failure’ were doing.

But thank God for giving us the right kind of leaders for the right kind of times! There were four main leaders God used that helped God’s people transition from Babylonian captivity to a life independent from that lifestyle once again. These men were: the Priest named Ezra, the Governor named Zerubbabel, the High Priest named Joshua, and our prophet here named Haggai.

As it relates to Haggai, God used this man to rally His people to complete a glorious work for God that would otherwise have gone undone. What is really incredible is that the ministry of Haggai only lasts for four months as it is recorded in this book. God lit a fire under this man to light a fire for His people. And when it was lit, the people began to move for God once again.

How to Think About Haggai

Haggai can be thought about by looking at the sermons he preaches to the people. Haggai consists of four main sermons in the brief two chapters of the book. These sermons are arranged by date and for our contemporary ease, the dates listed in this

work will be translated into our modern calendar to give you a better idea of when they were given.

A Change in the Seasons (Chapter 1): This sermon, according to our calendar, occurred September 1 and was a call for the people to stop the long delay of the project, and once again begin to build the temple.

A Motivating Exclamation (1:1-2)— Here we find the beginning of the first message and it starts off by beating the people to the punch of their explanation of why God’s work wasn’t done. After Haggai introduces himself and the timeframe in which he spoke, he immediately starts in on the people about their indifference regarding the temple— that no time was a good time. “Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD’s house should be built.”

A Miserable Excuse (1:3-11)— This passage speaks to the peoples’ inconsistent argument. They were arguing about time, “We don’t have time.” But God says, “Well, you’ve had time to do the things that you wanted to do.” Verse 4 says, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?” In other words, “You had time to build your houses, but you suddenly have no time to build mine?”

The rest of this passage is given to the fact that God wanted His people to have a burden for His work.

A Marvelous Experience (1:12-15)— This is the blessing attached to doing what God wants you to do. And as God’s word was spoken, the heart of Zerubbabel was stirred up along with Joshua the High Priest and everyone got to work right then and there.

A Call in the Fall (Chapter 2:1-9): It wasn’t long before God once again put a message in the heart of His servant Haggai. This message occurred October 21, and it was a sermon on greatness and prospective. There was a sad scene of the older ones who saw the glory of the former temple, and when they had seen this one, their hearts were breaking because in their minds, it wasn’t the same. Therefore, this section deals with the past, present, and future as God assures His people that though the temple was smaller, the glory would be greater.

A Winter Sermon for Winter Hearts (2:10-19): This is a call to cleanness, or holiness and was delivered December 24 (but it has nothing to do with Christmas Eve).

Blessings Withheld (verses 10-17): These are all the reasons God’s people were not experiencing blessing. Even if you’re doing all the right things, and your heart isn’t right, God will not bless. He never blesses uncleanness.

Blessings Waiting (verses 18-19): However, on the other side is God’s blessing for those who would do things God’s way. They were asked to mark the day and make it a day when God’s blessing would come upon them. God had blessings just waiting for His people.

A Winter Sermon to Set a Heart on Fire (2:20-23): This was a sermon specifically for the governor Zerubbabel on the same day Haggai spoke to the people. This sermon was also delivered on December 24, and was solely intended to encourage God’s leader.

Any time a godly work is being conducted, ungodly work makes its mission to stop it. And because God’s leaders set the tone for progress, they are the most obvious target to hinder progress. So here is a message from God’s man to stay the course and stay faithful.

What to Look for in Haggai

Promises— There are a few really important promises mentioned in this book that we would do well to remember for our lives. All of these promises have to do with God’s faithfulness.

A Promise of Faithfulness While We Commence His Work: In 1:13, we find written “Then spake Haggai the LORD’s messenger in the Lord’s message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD.” Once again the temple was not completed and a call went out to once again commence the work that God had called them to do. And for their motivation, God tells His people not to worry about the job itself because He would be with them every step of the way.

A Promise of Faithfulness While We Complete His Work: In 2:4, we read, “Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work; for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts;” During our reading of this prophecy, we quickly discover that the temple project was completed, but what sometimes happens is that once a project is completed, there is a sense of loss and stagnancy once the excitement wears off. But God’s promise here says that He will be with us to help us through another time of transition.

A Promise of Faithfulness While We Continue His Work: Then in 2:5 we see God continue and say, “According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.”

This God saying, “I have been with you in the past, and I’ll be with you now. Don’t be afraid to move forward.” And understand, this is God’s continued promise for us as well.

What to Gain from Haggai

If You Receive a Work from God, Don’t Stop Until It’s Done: The problem came for these people when they only did God’s work in part. However, after they disengaged from service, that’s when the work stopped, and then, that’s when God’s work, or just the idea of God’s work, became a scourge to them instead of a blessing. They became pessimistic about service. Their passion for God quenched, and the idea to continue was dismissed.

What is important for us to learn here, is that if we have a job to do, it’s best that we see it through. Some are projects we engage in together that have a limited timeline, and others are lifelong jobs (witnessing, continued spiritual growth, etc.) that are only to be ceased with God taking us home. Let’s finish strong.

If You Do Stop, Allow God’s Word to Rekindle Your Heart: The absolute worst thing you can do, if you find yourself being pulled away from God, is to harden your heart to a call to come back and start working again. You’ll notice in this book, God’s message stirred the heart of the leaders, and the leaders stirred and directed the hearts of the people so that the work would continue. However, this could have gone the other way. The people could have hardened their hearts and stayed right where they were. From this prophecy, we have an example to follow of how to respond to God’s word if we find ourselves off course.

If You Continue God’s Work, Expect Constant Opposition: The entire reason the work was stopped in the first place is because there was opposition to the project. Let’s not be surprised when the work we do for God is challenged.

If You Are Doing God’s Work, You Can Expect Strength to Overcome: If our work is truly a work from God, there is absolutely no way God will be defeated. We have seen God having to calm His people down several times saying, “I have with you... I am with you.” God’s work comes with God’s advantages... His power.

If You Value God’s Work, Keep Your Leaders Encouraged: If you remember, Governor Zerubbabel received his very own message. God’s leaders need encouragement too. Once again, Satan attacks leadership; and the reason he does this is because it is the fastest way to stop God’s work from continuing. So if we want God’s work to continue, remember to keep your leaders encouraged.

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