

Lessons from Haggai
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Even though God's people endured many cycles of judgments, they still had to be reminded of His grace and importance in their lives. Such was the job of one such prophet named Haggai. This paper will give a brief exegesis of his book and identify lessons applicable not only to God's people then, but to believers today.

The book of Haggai is among the shortest in the Bible, but its brief two chapters contain some valuable insights. Chapter one begins with Haggai bringing the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, head of the tribe of Judah at the time of their return from captivity in Babylon (Lockyer, 1986). God says, "These people say, The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built" (Haggai 1:2, NIV). Then God asks, "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin" (Haggai 1:3, NIV)? God then instructs the people to consider their ways and what those ways have brought them, namely poverty. For example, "You have planted much, but have harvested little" (Haggai 1:6a, NIV). The people neglected God's house in favor of worldly pursuits. Because of this God has withheld his blessings from them (Henry, 1721), and He explains how He has done this with detail in verses 7 through 11. God tells Haggai how, while people concentrated on their own houses leaving His in ruin, he brought on a drought that has effected everything the ground produces including crops and cattle.

In verse 12, Haggai records how Zerubbabel and the rest of the people heard the Lord and obeyed. Therefore, God responds by encouraging the people by revealing to Haggai that He is with them. The chapter closes indicating the people respond further by beginning work on the restoration of the temple.

Chapter two of the book of Haggai opens with the word of the Lord, again providing more encouragement to the people. Their situation has changed significantly since the time of Solomon and it seems that they are concerned about how their work will compare to Solomon's

temple. God encourages them to be strong and assures them that He is with them (Haggai 2:1-5). In verses 6 through 9, God gives the people a sketchy description of how the temple now being built will have greater glory than Solomon's temple. But first, judgments of the nations will take place over all nations, such that the heavens, the earth, the sea and dry land will be shaken.

In verses 10 through 19, God again comes to Haggai asking questions to provoke an understanding by the people that corruption is easier to pass on than holiness. Therefore, anything they attempt may become defiled due to their sinful nature. Because of this, they must always be watchful of their motives, that they be for God and not of themselves. God will bless those that are mindful of this but curse the wicked that are not (Henry, 1721).

Haggai closes out chapter 2 by once again receiving a word from the Lord. This time, God promises that Zerubbabel and Judah will be preserved regardless of what may lay ahead. On a future day, God promises to make Zerubbabel like a signet ring, eluding that they will be together because of his faithfulness (Henry, 1721).

The applications for today from Haggai are many. In general, people need to be mindful of their priorities, their motives, and their condition. The people of Judah were not unlike people today with how they prioritize their lives. Often people get caught up in the cares of this world, trying to achieve a position, acquire possessions like houses and cars, or engage in extravagant forms of leisure. The problem is that people now, just like in Judah of Haggai's time, fail to count the costs. They spend countless hours away from their family trying to get that position at work that will bring in that little extra income to make the lifestyle they live beyond their means just a little bit easier to maintain. But instead, another expense pops up and the cycle repeats itself. To try to bring a little happiness into their lives, they seek pleasures in an ever-increasing variety. Momentary happiness may be achieved but not everlasting joy. What Haggai reminds

us is that it is God that blesses but He holds back when people's priorities are not correct. Rather than being so concerned about the things of this world, people should instead be concerned about the things of God. God, in the time of Haggai dwelled in the temple and He wanted it to be a priority for them then. But today, God's temple is the heart and being mindful of that should be a priority in our lives today.

Having the correct priorities is great, but this comes to naught if it is not done with the right motives. When the people of Judah made the house of God their priority, they became concerned about how their temple compared with that of Solomon's temple rather than just serving God to the best of their potential. People today often get caught up in building or seeking the church with the right facilities, the right people, and the right doctrine. They may also get caught up in comparing themselves to others spiritually. The idea should be to approach God with a sincere desire to worship and serve utilizing their abilities as best as they can, wherever God puts them. If people approach God with the right motives, He will bless them just as he promised Judah.

Probably the most important lesson in the book of Haggai is that before someone can set their priorities towards God and approach Him with the right motives, they must first understand their own spiritual condition. God explained to Judah how it is much easier to pass on uncleanness than it is to pass on holiness. It has been said that it is easier to destroy than to create, easier to do wrong than to do right, particularly in a society like that of today. People of any age need to understand that they have a sinful nature, and no matter how good they try to be or works they try to accomplish, that aspect of their nature is always there. While a person may seem good to others, to God he or she is still a sinner in need of His saving grace and protection. Without this gift of grace and protection from God, like that promised to Judah of the past, there is no future for them or us.

This paper has provided a brief exegesis of the book of Haggai outlining God's revelations to the prophet and to Judah. From these revelations, applications can be made today in various areas of people's lives including how they set priorities in their lives, their motives in regards to service to God, and their knowledge of their own spiritual condition.

References

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