**Study of Haggai**

**Purpose**

To call God’s people (Jews) to complete the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

**Context**

In **537 BC** the first cohort returned to Jerusalem with the Royals (Zerubbabel) from exile in Babylon.

The temple had been destroyed in 586 BC and Cyrus allowed this first group to return to rebuild the temple. They had started well but the work had stopped and so in **520 BC** God spoke to his prophet Haggai to encourage the people to complete the work they had started.

God used the ministries of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (520-515) to renew focus, intentionality, and passion amongst the Jews for God’s work so that God’s good purpose and plan could be completed, and the temple of His presence be established again in the city of God – Jerusalem.

**Pivotal theme**

Get your priorities straight, resist sin and the devil. Seek first God’s kingdom and all other things will be given to you as well. Complete what you have started. Don’t lose your focus and passion. Don’t give up despite opposition. Trust God and you will produce fruit that will last for His kingdom.

**Key point**

God is with us. What we do for Him He will use for His good purpose and for His glory.

**Chapter 1 – Reconfigured**

Ezra 4:4-24 records how King Artaxerxes of Persia ordered the work on the temple to stop after he was persuaded that the Jews and the temple, they were rebuilding were a threat to him and his authority in the empire.

And so, the work on the temple stopped for 10 years.

But then God…commissioned Haggai to speak to the leaders in Jerusalem to challenge them about the unfinished temple.

He challenged those who had acquiesced and were satisfied with the false notion that: ‘*The time has not yet come to rebuild the house.’*

However, Haggai a true prophet, spoke the word of God: ‘*Is it time for you to living in your paneled houses whilst this house remains a ruin?’ (3-4).*

It seems the Jews had allowed the opposition to not only stop the work, but ruin their ability to hear God’s voice. They were listening to the wrong voices!

*‘You have planted much but harvested little*.’ Haggai did not hold back but told them they had become selfish focussing on their own houses and lives instead of God’s, but the harder they worked the less productive they were. He challenged them to look hard at their lives and see the result of their selfishness- they had produced little -‘*I blew it away.’* God had not blessed the work of their hands instead He had called for drought on their crops, livestock, vines (5-11). The people had been looking to these for their security while neglecting their true and proper worship of God.

And so, God commands them through Haggai to get restarted on the building – *‘go up and bring timber for my house so that I might take pleasure in it.’*

The sovereignty of God is in focus here. He controls the wind and the rain. He controls the harvests. In his hands are both blessings and curses. His purposes and plans prevail not mans’. (Isaiah 46:9-11) Our destiny is in God’s hands.

Obedience invites God’s blessing. Disobedience – judgement.

Verse 12 **Prompt obedience** - Then Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the priest feared and obeyed the voice of the Lord (Psalm 111:10) and so God stirred up their spirits and the spirits of the whole remnant to restart the work on the temple.

**Application**

* Compare and contrast Nehemiah’s **response to the opposition** with the Jews here. (Nehemiah 4:4-5/13-15/6:8-9).
* **First place** – Are we putting God at the centre of our lives? Many things can nudge God to be off centre: SELF, family, ambition, desire for money/possessions, laziness, apathy, unbelief. The first commandment says: ‘*You shall have no other gods before me’* (Exodus 20:3-4). Matthew 6:33 – *Seek first His kingdom and all these things shall be given to you. Romans 12: 1-2 encourages* us *to offer ourselves as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God which is our true and proper worship. Hebrews 12:1-3* tells us to fix/focus our eyes on Jesus and throw off everything that hinders and run our race – marked out for us by God. Ephesians 1:10 says: *We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.*
* **Misplaced priorities** will ruin our relationship with God. God judged their wrong focus in order to call them back to himself. How easy is it to forget God’s Word to us? Read and reflect on *Psalm 106: 10-15.*
* **Joy of obedience** Obedience can be tough and challenging. Strong faith and a close walk with God will be needed if we are to see God’s word fulfilled. But blessing follows obedience (Isaiah 1:19/Isaah 55:2)

Examples of servants of God who have obeyed and seen God’s word fulfilled:

Abraham – Genesis 22:1-18)

Joshua - (Joshua 1: 7-9)/11:12-15/23).

Jesus - Jesus obeyed his father (John 6:38/Luke 22:42) – He came to do God’s will).

Paul- Acts 26:15-19

What about you? Us? Are we willing to do God’s will?

**Chapter 2 The promised glory**

In October 520 BC Haggai brought his second message of encouragement to Zerubbabel and Joshua the leaders of the building project and the people. He told them not to be discouraged and compare the new temple with Solomon’s temple which was very grand (1 Chronicles 28-29/2 Chronicles 3-4)**.** Because this is not about bricks and mortar, silver, or gold, but about the presence of God who will fill it with His glory.

Zechariah 4:10 *Do not despise the day of small things…*

Clearly some of the Jews who remembered Solomon’s great temple were downcast, because this one was smaller and less ornate, but Haggai encouraged them to look beyond the outward appearance at what is most important -the One who will fill it.

Verse 9 - God promised the people that he was with them and so to be strong and not to fear and he gave them a wonderful promise to hold on to: *the glory of the present house will be greater than the former and, in this place, I will grant peace.*

All God needed was willing hands and willing hearts. God would provide the silver and gold (8), all the resources necessary to complete the temple.

**Application**

* Discussthe difference **‘*I am with you*, *do not fear* ‘**makes to a project - What God commissions He will complete. Psalm 127:1 *Unless the Lord builds the house the labourers build in vain.*

Matthew 16:18 *I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.*

* **Appearance can be deceptive**: God’s upside-down kingdom - Many who were waiting for the Messiah were disappointed when Jesus came as a humble carpenter and rabbi. They were expecting the messiah to be a David-like king/warrior, who would come and defeat their enemies. But Jesus came to serve and die, and His kingdom was a spiritual kingdom that was hidden (Matthew 13:44). Think about the differences between what God values and what the world values.
* **Future meaning of the passage – the worldwide reign of the Messiah -** Transition from temporal– eternal/spiritual (John 2:19-22) Someone greater than the temple is here – Jesus the living temple embodied the presence of God. When Jesus died on the cross the curtain in the temple in Jerusalem was torn in two and the holy of holies was opened to all not just the high priest. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, he came for all. God shook the heavens and the earth, and His Spirit was poured out on people from every tribe and tongue not just the Jews (Acts 2).
* **Are we prepared to be willing hands?** God chooses to work through his people. He could do it without us but chooses to work in and through us. He equips us with His Spirit and His word and then moves us to act in obedience.

**2:10-19 God’s way - Holiness**

Haggai brings his 3rd message to the people which is crucial to the success of the rebuilding venture**.** God makes it very clear that ***clean hands and a pure heart*** are prerequisites for success in God’s kingdom. (Psalm 24:3-5)

He uses 2 analogies:

* Consecrated meat that accidentally touches bread, wine or oil does not transfer consecration to them.
* However, in contrast a person, who has become defiled by touching a dead body who then touches bread, wine or olive oil does transfer the defilement to these things.

The meaning of the analogies is this: That HOLINESS does not rub off whereas SIN does. SIN contaminates. Another picture might be of a bad apple in a bowl of fruit – the bad apple will contaminate the other fruits and they will also turn bad.

Sin ruins and spoils. It is like an infectious disease. It spreads.

Holiness however needs effort and decision and comes by obeying God’s word. Deliberately and intentionally choosing to walk and live by God’s holy ways and saying no to sin.

God goes on to say that because of their sin he had judged them and allowed bad things into their life with the aim of jolting them to their senses. Their work had produced little. BUT now God says: *‘From this now on I will bless you.’* (2:19) What a fantastic promise!

**Application**

* **How can we be holy?** *Be holy because I am holy* **-** commanded by God (1 Peter 1:15) Do we regularly examine our behaviour?

Our personal life can infect our co-workers and ruin and spoil our corporate ministry because it might cause God to withhold His blessings.

Put off the bad and put on the good- Ephesians 4:20-32 / 1 Peter 1: 15-17/2:1-3.

* **God’s discipline** Not all bad things or lack of progress in our lives is from the Devil. Sometimes it is God who is punishing us – (Hebrews 12:4-11) God disciplines us for our own good – because He is our heavenly Father and loves us and wants us to grow into the likeness of his Son, Jesus. In the same way parents discipline their children to keep them safe.

**2:20-23 What a promise!**

Haggai’s final message is a wonderful prophecy and promise about the future when all their enemies and the enemies of God will be defeated, but Zerubbabel as God’s servant, will be established in peace and with authority.

***‘I have chosen you’*** God compares him to his signet ring – guaranteeing Zerubbabel’s authority and position. What a tremendous affirmation for Zerubbabel. In difficult times I’m sure he held on to that word like an anchor to his soul.

**Application**

* We are also chosen! - Ephesians 1:4-5 – *‘For* ***he chose us*** *in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will.’* In his mercy God has chosen to save us and grant us the gift of eternal life.
* **Do you feel like a nobody? Do you question your value in this world or even to God?** God assures us that we are valued in His eyes – Isaiah 43:4-5a- *‘Since you are precious and honoured in my sight, and because I love you…Do not be afraid, I am with you.’* We can move ahead in what he has asked us to do because He is God and will equip, empower and inspire us and never leave us. We do not need to look for acclaim from people because our reward comes from God (Ephesians 6:8).
* **Gideon** struggled with self-worth, with feelings of inferiority, but God chose him to defeat the Midianites. He affirmed him: *‘The Lord is with you, mighty warrior!’* (Judges 6:12 – 16).

God sees our potential and encourages us to grow into the person he has destined us to be for him. We can be encouraged that although we feel weak or foolish these are the very people God chooses to work for him. When we are weak, we can draw and depend upon God’s power and strength to accomplish great things for him (1 Corinthians 1:27-31/2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

**Final summary –** Haggai was sent by God to help the Jews realign their priorities and motivate them to rebuild the temple. They had been placing a higher priority on their own personal comfort than on God’s work and true worship and had allowed sin and opposition to spoil their relationship with him. But God promised them that if they put Him first, he would be pleased and give them the necessary strength and guidance they needed to do what he called them to do**. And He does the same for us!**

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