

HAGGAI



REBUILDING THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD

TIME TO REFOCUS

(3 BIBLE STUDIES)

EXAMINAPPLICATION

BIBLE STUDIES

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THE SMALL PRINT

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GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THESE STUDIES

Your Commitment

I would encourage you to make a commitment to attending your group regularly. I realise that sometimes there are things that get in the way, but do prioritise studying the Bible with other. This will involve sacrifice, and effective use of your time, but I really believe that in doing so you will get the most out of studying the Bible and praying together in your small group.

Your Contribution

What you put into the group is going to determine what you get out of the group. I encourage you to contribute honestly to the discussion and workings of the group. I understand people come from different backgrounds with unique personalities & life experiences. But, we all have a big part to play, so I encourage you to be fully present and take ownership of your group.

Your Preparation

These materials are primarily for use in preparing and/or leading group discussions, but they will also be useful in keeping your thoughts together in one place. The materials provide you with the passage so that you can identify and highlight recurring themes and note down your own thoughts and questions. Also, the materials include questions designed to provoke thought, and help you reflect on what the passage meant, both at the time it was written, and also what it means for us now.

I would encourage you to make good use of these materials, as doing so will help you contribute and get the most out of the group discussions. The materials are, however, only “tools” – they are there to help you, and not to restrict you, or force you to think in a certain manner. I want to see God speaking to you through these passages, and if the questions or notes don't help you, simply don't use them!

I have also included within these materials an introduction to the book. Make of this what you will, but I hope that it is helpful in getting you started with these studies!

Your Leadership

Here are some useful pointers in how to lead your Bible study group. Be aware that included in this study guide are more questions than you can possibly ask and/or answer in one session. They are not designed to be used rigidly, and there will rarely be a need to ask every question! Make sure that you spend some time praying at the start and ensure you read & re-read the passages as much as possible. In relation to the passages, then consider the suggested questions with an open mind. There is rarely “a single right answer” and I would encourage you to share your thoughts with your group.

I have also included a number of quotations from relevant Christian literature, most of which are readily available online if you want to do further thinking or study. My prayer is that as you study together you would grow to love Jesus and experience Him more deeply.

I would appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how to make these materials even better!

*Steve McClure
Spring 2019*

INTRODUCING HAGGAI

After the people of Judah were exiled to Babylon, Cyrus the ruler of Persia allowed around 50,000 Jews (under the leadership of Zerubbabel) to return to Jerusalem so that they could rebuild the temple (see Ezra 1-2). The building work however was interrupted (see Ezra 3) following a period of opposition and two prophets (Haggai and Zechariah) encourage the exiles to get back to work.

The timeline of these events is very clear because there are so many precise references to the timing throughout these books. The timeline is therefore as follows: In 538BC the decree is issued allowing them to return (Ezra 1). In 536BC foundations are completed (Ezra 3). In 522BC there is a new King of Persia (Darius). In 520BC work grinds to a halt and Haggai and Zechariah give their prophecies. In 516BC the temple was finally finished and dedicated to God (Ezra 6). Within Haggai we see from verses 1:1,15, 2:1,10 & 20 that all of Haggai's prophecy was given during a period of four months in 520BC, the second year of the reign of Darius in Persia.

The prophecy of Haggai is primarily focused on the rebuilding of God's temple in Jerusalem. It begins with a rebuke because while they were busy panelling their own houses God's house lay in ruins. The ruins of the temple were a picture of the decaying relationship with God – a picture of defilement. The thrust of the prophecy is an impassioned call to get back to the work of rebuilding but it signified something greater. The temple was always a big part of God's means of relating with His people: it was of paramount importance that this building was restored.

Haggai ends with a prophecy about the restoration of David's house. Zerubbabel (the Governor of Judah) was a descendent and heir of King David (see Matthew 1:13). The promise here about making Zerubbabel like His signet ring, is about the restoration of the Messiahship through the line of David. The new temple wouldn't be a match for the glory of Solomon's temple (2:2-3) but in another sense it would have greater glory (2:9) because this would be the temple that Jesus would come to.

In the New Testament Jesus declares that He is going to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days (John 2:19-20, Matthew 26:61, 27:40). This temple He was referring to was of course His body – crucified and yet raised again to life three days later. In the Old testament God dwelt in the Tabernacle, and later the Temple, but in the New Testament we are told that if we are in Christ, we are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19) who dwells within us. Further Peter makes it clear (1 Peter 2:5) that we are being built together into a spiritual house. Haggai is a huge challenge to us today that we also need to attend to the work on God's house. How is your relationship with God? Have you also got your priorities mixed up and left your relationship with God in disarray? The message of Haggai is a message to return to God and make the most important thing (i.e. knowing God) the most important thing! Things had been pretty difficult for the exiles because God's house remained a ruin (see 1:6-11) but at the end of the book we have a new promise that from now on God will bless them (2:19).

Haggai helps us see that today God is calling us to reflect and reprioritise.

*Steve McClure
Spring 2019*

STUDY 1 – HAGGAI 1 – MISDIRECTED PRIORITIES

INTRODUCTION: Haggai 1 demonstrates how misplaced priorities hinder the work of God. The specific issue here is the work of rebuilding God's house which lay in ruins. Haggai asks them to reflect on their ways and see how God had been thwarting their efforts to draw them to Him.

SETTING THE SCENE: What are the really important, though not always seemingly urgent priorities that often slip down your to-do-list? Why is that? What is context and background of Haggai's message here (see Ezra 5:1, 6:14 and the Introduction) to get on with rebuilding the temple?

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WRONG PRIORITIES (v1-4): What is Haggai prophecy convicting the remnant of Israel of doing or not doing? Why did the people say *the time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built* (v2)? Was it wrong for the people to be living in panelled houses (v3)? What does it say about their priorities?

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GIVE CAREFUL THOUGHT TO YOUR WAYS (v5): What does it look like to *give careful thought to your ways* (v5 & 7 plus also in 2:15 & 18)? Why do we procrastinate in doing God's will? In what ways do we act in similar ways in putting our plans ahead of God and his work (see also Matt 6:33)?

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MOTIVATION TO BUILD (v8): What does Haggai say should be their motivation to rebuild the temple? The temple was where God dwelt but in the New Testament we are told that God's Spirit now dwells in us and we are now His house: what might it mean for us to neglect God's house today?

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"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" 1 Corinthians 6:19a

“...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” **1 Peter 2:5**

GOD DISCIPLINES THOSE HE LOVES (v6-7 & v9-11): What were the consequences of pursuing their own desires (v6)? How do you understand this idea that God appears to discipline His people by frustrating their efforts? To what extent might it take certain situations or circumstances in order for God to teach us things or to humble us? How has God disciplined you in the past?

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THE PEOPLE’S RESPONSE (v12-15): We read that all the people responded in fear and obedience: what might that have looked like and what do you think led them to this response? In your experience how have such responses led to worship, intimacy with God and/or action?

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In v14b we are told that *they began work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God*. What would you say is our role in encouraging others to put God first? Why is fellowship with God and His people so important in motivating us to worship and serve Him (Hebrews 10:24-25)?

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DRAWING IT ALL TOGETHER: How would you summarise the challenging message of this chapter? What would you say that God has been saying to you about building His house?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share together about your own priorities: which ones are helpful and which are less so. Pray for one another that you would seek God first above all else and commit to praying for one another in these things during the coming week.

MEMORY VERSES: HAGGAI 1:5-6

“God will stop at nothing as He works unceasingly for His glory, for our good, and for our transformation into the likeness of His Son.” Steve McClure

STUDY 2 – HAGGAI 2:1-9 – TAKE HEART AND WORK

INTRODUCTION: In this study, having got their priorities straight and resumed the work of God, Haggai continued to preach to the people. It wasn't enough that they got back to work. He wanted to make sure that they were doing the work with the right motives.

SETTING THE SCENE: What has your experience been of great buildings, which when rebuilt have generated a mix of reactions? How would this be different for those who experienced the old buildings and those who did not? What might be some of the challenges regarding hopes and expectations?

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FORMER GLORY (v2-3): God tells Haggai to ask about them about the previous temple (built by Solomon): what discouraged them to the point that they had stopped their work on rebuilding the new temple (see Ezra 3:12-13 for the reaction to the building of the foundations some years previously)?

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*¹² But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. ¹³ No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away. **Ezra 3:12-13***

Having previously given up why do you think God would raise this once more? In light of this, what was motivating them to start building again and were these motivations good? The remainder of the section focuses on the reasons God gives them to get stuck in and complete the work:

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BE STRONG AND DO NOT FEAR (v4-5): How does God encourage the people to take heart and resume work on His house in these verses? How can we take strength from this today? Why is God's presence, and specifically God's Spirit with them in this endeavour such a big deal?

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If we are building God's kingdom, why is it important to know that God is with us (see also Matthew 28:19-20)? How can we best use our talents and abilities for God's work and His glory?
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ALL CREATION WILL BE SHAKEN... (v6-8): This idea is also seen in Amos 8:8, 9:15, Isaiah 2:13-21, 13:13 & 29:6, Joel 3:16 and Ezekiel 38:20. What does this picture convey about what God is intending to do in a *little while*? What does Hebrews 12:26-29 (which quotes v6) add to this? How does v7 show us how this shaking will lead to all nations coming into God's house?
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GREATER GLORY AND PEACE (v9): In light of v2-3, why then does God say that this new house will indeed be more glorious in v9a (think Jesus)? God's people were always drawn to His temple: what challenges the fact that we are now God's temples raise for us? What does God mean by *I will grant peace* (v9b) and how would this have been an encouraging message to hear?
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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: How would all of this have been an encouragement for them to restart the work on the temple? How does it encourage you also to get building?
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DEAS FOR PRAYER: Talk together about your own heart and motivations; i.e. the things that lie behind the things you do. Pray that the motivations given in this section would inspire you to give yourself to building God's house in your own life and communities.

MEMORY VERSE: HAGGAI 2:4

STUDY 3 – HAGGAI 2:10-23 – PROMISED BLESSING

INTRODUCTION: In this study God (through Haggai) uses an illustration of defilement to show the contagiousness of sin and point them instead towards holiness. God promises that from then on there would be blessing and there are pointers also towards God's ultimate rescuer, the Messiah through whom God would shake the heavens and the earth.

SETTING THE SCENE: To what extent would you say that our promises are (or should be) conditional upon some form of faithfulness or obedience? As you think of God's unfailing promises (see Joshua 21:45 & 23:14), to what extent is their fulfilment dependent (or not dependent) on our obedience?

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DEFILEMENT (v10-14): What is the point of the example God gives about meat and defilement? How do you understand what God says in v14 about His people? What is your experience of the *contagiousness* (or lack thereof) of both holiness (consecration) and sin (defilement)? How does this most visual example point to their (and indeed our) need of grace?

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GIVE CAREFUL THOUGHT (v15-18): Why do you think God repeatedly uses the phrase *give careful thought* here? Why is it so important that they look back to how things were before beginning the work? What situations, experiences and lessons are important for us to look back to in our own lives?

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FROM NOW ON I WILL BLESS YOU (v19): Why do you think God says He will now bless them (v19)? How have you experienced God withdrawing his blessing (or fruitfulness) and/or frustrating your work? What conclusions can we (or should we) draw between the restarting of work (their means of relating to God) and the return of God's blessing? Does obedience guarantee blessing?

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ALL CHANGE (v20-22): How do you understand the idea that God is going to 'shake the heavens and the earth' (v21), overturn royal thrones, shatter the power of foreign kingdoms and overthrow chariots (v22)? When do you think this has and/or will be fulfilled? How do you respond to God's sovereignty?

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MY SIGNET RING (v23): The signet ring (engraved with the King's seal) was used to endorse all official documents and to guard against theft was normally kept on the King's person. What is the 'day' (v23) referred to here and what is the significance here that Zerubbabel was to be made like God's signet ring (see also Jer 22:24–27)?

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How do these rich promises about the Messiah (Zerubbabel was part of the Davidic line – see Matt 1:13) encourage and inspire you as you walk with Jesus today?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: Haggai calls the people to faithful service: God waits to bless but cannot while His people are apathetic. They only experience shortfall whereas God wants to shower them with good things. How is Haggai's message applicable to us today? When might God say to us 'take courage, work and do not fear'?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share together about the ways that God has been speaking to you from the prophecy of Haggai. Pray through some of the encouragements from today's study and ask God to give you a heart to reflect on your ways and obey God in all that you do.

MEMORY VERSE: HAGGAI 2:23

MEMORY VERSES

WEEK 1: HAGGAI 1 – MISDIRECTED PRIORITIES

“Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. ⁶You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.”

Haggai 1:5-6

WEEK 2: HAGGAI 2:1-9 – TAKE HEART AND WORK

“‘Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the LORD, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the LORD Almighty.”

Haggai 2:4

WEEK 3: HAGGAI 2:10-23 – PROMISED BLESSING

“‘On that day,’ declares the LORD Almighty, ‘I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,’ declares the LORD Almighty.”

Haggai 2:23