

Day 1

Learn: In 586BC, Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, including the temple, and exiled most of the prominent people of the southern half of Israel [Judah]. In 539BC, after Persia conquered Babylon, Cyrus, King of Persia, allowed about 50,000 Jews to return to Jerusalem. Haggai was the first prophet of God to this “postexilic” [after the exile] community. Read Haggai 1.1-2. Haggai delivered his first prophecy on August 29, 520BC. Zerubbabel is a Babylonian name, but he was a grandson of the last legitimate king of Judah, Jehoiachin [1 Chronicles 3.19], and an ancestor of Jesus [Mathew 1; Luke 3]. Zerubbabel might have been the legitimate king of Israel in the line of David, but he served as political overseer for the Persians. Joshua was a legitimate high priest, descended from Aaron. So the people had political and religious leadership approved by God. Haggai calls God “LORD [Yahweh] Almighty” or “LORD [Yahweh] of hosts” [depending on your translation]. The Hebrew referred to military troops, in God’s case angelic armies. The name emphasized God’s immense power, which should frighten people into respecting God or encourage them to trust in God. Based on what God said and how he said it, which do you think was the point here?

Reflect: Some prophecy was foretelling the future, but most was “forthtelling,” calling people back to walk with God in covenant relationship. This is similar to the exhortations of preachers today: we should respond to God’s revelation with faith and obedience, repenting of our sins and mistakes, seeking to get right with God in that area of life. When you hear Bible teaching, are you eager to learn intellectually, but also to hear how you could be closer to God, more faithful and obedient, better reflecting his character and doing his will? Pray about developing that attitude; ask God to show you even now what he would have you change in life. How could you be more intentional about learning and living out God’s expectations in our covenant relationship?

Day 2

Learn: Read Haggai 1.1-5. The temple was essential in their religion and relationship with God. It was their central place of worship, where they brought tithes and offerings to please God and appease his wrath over sin, and the place where God would dwell among his people, so through the religious leaders they could have access to him. The postexilic community understood this. When they first returned, they set up a working altar and began repairing the foundation for the temple. But then construction stopped for almost two decades. They faced hostility from outsiders, but God reveals the real problem: they put off rebuilding the temple so they could focus on their own houses, their own lives. They sought God’s blessing, but whatever he gave them they used for themselves, not investing in ministry, not showing devotion to God.

Reflect: God said, “Consider your ways!” Should we? We have busy lives, with work, school, social activities, daily entertainment and fun, not only raising up children but ferrying them to assorted activities; some of us work on our houses and gardens, like the postexilic community. None of those are bad in themselves, neither was their fixing up their houses. The issue is priorities. In what ways do we allow our blessings in life to distract us from worship, from putting God first as our priority, from showing God proper devotion and doing his will in ministry? How many hours do you spend in a week doing each of those other things? Contrast that with time spent with God or working for God. Do the same comparison for how you spend your money compared to your giving to the church. Do you allow social pressure from family, friends, or others to deter your zeal for God, for praising his name, for getting more involved at church? Pray and consider your ways.

Day 3

Learn: Read Haggai 1.1-7. It seems obvious that, because the people had neglected God and their duty to God, he had withdrawn his blessing on their economy. It is important to understand that God had a covenant relationship with Israel. Everything you read in the Old Testament after Genesis in some way relates to the

Mosaic Covenant God established between himself and Israel as his representative people. In the books of Moses [elaborated later by prophets and sages], God specified certain expectations for his people, and he promised specific blessings for obedience to these expectations and specific curses for disobedience [for example, Leviticus 26.23-26; Deuteronomy 28.38-40, 47-48]. As we will see, God had brought a drought, even withholding the dew, and it had affected all the crops and thus all the animals, and thus the whole economy.

Reflect: We have a different covenant today, so we do not share in every promise of blessing and cursing God gave to Israel. But if we do not live God's way as revealed in scripture, if we do not make him our priority and show him proper devotion, then we remove ourselves from his blessing. Walking away from God to pursue your own path means walking away from intimacy with him, spiritual empowerment and growth, experiencing the fruit of the Spirit [like transcendent joy and peace], divine enlightenment and inspiration. We blame others, even God, when we struggle, but God told the Israelites to consider *their* ways. They had dug their own hole, as we often do. We might choose the wrong path because it looks attractive in worldly terms, but the path to ultimate blessing, to true spiritual life, to being joyful and peaceful instead of anxious and stressed, is to live God's way, walking through life with him. Pray for discernment about your life, how you could be blessed more by choosing to give up more for God. How could you use blessings from God for his purposes?

Day 4

Learn: Read Haggai 1.8-12. The people needed the temple, because in their covenant with God the temple was necessary for access to God through the priests and for pleasing God through sacrifices. So when God gave them as a corrective the specific instruction of getting timber to build the temple, it was not only about timber for building a monument, it was about repenting [turning away from sin, back to God], repenting to get their priorities right, so they could properly worship and thus be blessed. The stone needed was lying around from the previous temple, but they needed wood because the Babylonians had burned the wood in 586BC. Haggai told the people they were in sin, God was displeased, they were suffering covenant curses as a result, so they needed to repent and focus on building the temple. How did they respond?

Reflect: The people repented. They responded in attitude [reverence] and action [obedience]. Some translations say they respected or revered God; this is not wrong, but the Hebrew word is stronger, implying fear. The LORD Almighty deserves that kind of respect, that we look at him not just as a capable and kind fellow, but as the most powerful being in the universe who gets so angry about sin that in biblical history we see him condemn people to Hell, kill them on the spot, bring plagues and droughts upon them, exile them into slavery. God is our all-powerful protector; he also is our all-powerful *master*. In what ways does your life suggest you do or do not have a healthy fear of God? How would God want us to show fearful reverence?

Day 5

Learn: Read Haggai 1.12-15. God promised to be with them, implying his unconditional love and forgiveness, as well as his ongoing provision and empowerment. The people not only needed to depend on God for blessing in their economy, but also for protection from hostile forces, deliverance from foreign oppression, success in building the temple, and guidance for living right.

Reflect: Jesus gave us a similar promise in Matthew 28.20. We need to depend on God today. We are saved by his grace; we are transformed [sanctified] to be more like Christ [reflecting God's character] by his grace; we are blessed with so much in the way of income, housing, family, church, and more, by his grace. We need his grace to walk in his ways. Yet we often forget how much we need to depend on him. In what ways might you be relying on your own power, instead of God's? Would you feel more hopeful and/or humble if you were focused more on God's promises and less on your own abilities? Fortunately, we have the Holy Spirit within, to energize and encourage and empower us! Pray to think properly about these things.