

## **BOOK OF HAGGAI**

1. Haggai was a post-exilic prophet. Post-exile period means the period after the 70 years of captivity in Babylon and the Jews were then free to return to Jerusalem if they wanted to.
2. Haggai's ministry overlapped with Zechariah's ministry (both of them were post-exilic prophets).
3. Before the exile of the Jews, the mission of prophets was to warn the people to repent or be punished.
  - a) After the exile, the Jews learnt their lesson and they never worshipped idols again.
  - b) They became obedient rather than resistant to prophets knowing that the prophets were right.
  - c) Therefore, the audience of Haggai was more open and teachable.
4. This is a short book (only 2 chapters) because Haggai's prophetic ministry was only over 3 months, compared to Isaiah or Jeremiah whose ministries were over a period of 40 to 50 years.
5. Haggai dated his prophecies exactly, with a clear sequence of events. So did Zechariah.
6. Not much, however, is known about Haggai. He was called for a season and time to do a specific job.

### **Background of the Book of Haggai**

1. The collapse of Babylon took place as prophesized by the prophets sent by God, just as Assyria's collapse was predicted as well. Babylon was taken over by Cyrus, the Persian King.
2. While Babylon adopted a scorched-earth policy, King Cyrus was benevolent. He allowed the Jewish exiles to return home to Jerusalem to build a temple there to pray to their God for him.
3. About 50,000 Jews left their homes in exile during the first return to Jerusalem.
  - a) But this was a very small number relative to the number of the Jews who did not return. They had multiplied and prospered greatly during their 70 years in exile.
  - b) The Jews were excellent in trading. Singapore's first Chief Minister, David Marshall, was a pure Jew from Baghdad of Iraq (around where Babylon was located).
4. These 50,000 Jews, who went back to Jerusalem, were making great sacrifices as there was nothing much left in Jerusalem compared to their prosperous homes in exile. These 50,000 Jews lived on God's promise and hoped that the new Kingdom would come.
5. There are 2 main characters in the book of Haggai.
  - a) The first character is Zerubbabel.
    - i. His name means "seed of Babylon" because he was born in Babylon. He had never seen Jerusalem before.
    - ii. He was the last survivor of King David's line. He was the grandson of King Jehoiachin whom the Babylonian King released to eat at the Babylonian King's table all the days of his life, by God's protection

- and grace, as recorded in 2 Kings 25:29. God preserved David's line, the root of Jesse, as He promised.
- iii. God sent Zerubbabel to lead the delegation of 50,000 Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.
- b) The second character is Joshua.
    - i. Joshua means "God saves".
    - ii. Joshua was the high priest from the line of the priests.
6. The 50,000 Jews went back to start building an altar and a temple.
- a) That was also exactly what Abraham did. Abraham was called out of Ur (also in the Babylon area) and the first thing Abraham did when he arrived in the Promised Land was to build an altar of worship.
  - b) So, literally the Israelites were back to square one after 2000 years.
7. These 50,000 Jews started with high hopes and built the altar as well as lay the foundation for the Temple.
- a) But they were very poor, had no crops or buildings to live in, etc. They needed to survive and so they began to neglect the building of the Temple.
  - b) After 2 years of building the Temple, they were demoralized and focused on building their own houses and businesses.
  - c) So, it resulted in an incomplete temple with low walls for 14 years.
8. Haggai was raised by God at this time to revive the work.

## Chapter 1

1. Haggai 1:1.
  - a) King Darius already succeeded King Cyrus of the Persian Empire at this time.
  - b) Haggai gave prophecies to the 2 main characters in this book, namely:
    - i. Zerubbabel, who was appointed as the governor of Judah \*equivalent to being the "king" of the Jews. This was the preservation by God of King David's line.
    - ii. Joshua, the high priest.
2. Haggai 1:2.
  - a) The Jews thought it was not the right time to rebuild the Temple and neglected it. They thought that they needed to build their own businesses and earn enough money first, so that they would have enough resources to rebuild the Temple. This is logical (not spiritual)..
  - b) Most Christians also think, "Let me build my life first, then I will serve God." We think we must have something before we can give to God.
3. Haggai 1:4.
  - a) God asked them if it was right for them to build their own houses first, resulting in them neglecting to rebuild the house of God. Similarly Christians give God their spare money.

- b) "Panelled houses" in this verse refers to the ultimate luxury. Trees were rare due to the scorched-earth policy adopted by Babylon. Therefore, they needed to import cedar timber from Lebanon.
  - c) They neglected the rebuilding of God's Temple for 14 years.
4. Haggai 1:4-5.
- a) God is saying, in these verses, that if you think putting your interests first and building your own success is the correct economics, then you will have to work extremely hard and still get very little. As a result, you will not really prosper. Human economics puts God out of the picture. It was already 14 years, yet they did not prosper.
  - b) God's economics is different. Put God first and He will bless your works. You will then have more than enough to serve God and yourself.
5. Haggai 1:7-9.
- a) God will blow away what you have when you try to do things that serve yourself.
    - i. Focus on the things of God and He will bless your works. That is God's economics.
    - ii. Matthew 6:33 says, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and all you need will be given to you." Not all that you want, but all that you need.
    - iii. It is not your wallet, but your soul that will be satisfied. There will be peace in every part of your life. This means your belly, heart and your relationships with God and men will all be blessed.
  - b) In verse 7, God reminded them to "Consider your ways". Basically ask yourself if you are totally satisfied with your life.
6. Haggai 1:10-11. Everything they laboured for seemed to fail because God caused a drought. That is human economics. We forget who is in control.
7. Haggai 1:11-12. Zerubbabel and Joshua listened and obeyed, so did all the 50,000 Jews who were in the first return to Jerusalem.
8. Haggai 1:15. Within 3 weeks, all of them considered their ways after Haggai's prophecy and obeyed God to rebuild the Temple.

## Chapter 2

1. Haggai 2:1-5.
- a) One month later, in the 7<sup>th</sup> month, they started to build the Temple but those (of age about 90 years old) who had seen the glory of the 1<sup>st</sup> Temple (built by Solomon) before it was destroyed, remembered and remarked that this rebuilt 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple was so pathetic and they wept. They ended up demoralizing the builders.
  - b) Haggai came and told them not to be demoralized. God said, "Be strong, God is with you and hang on." Often when we do God's work and do not see the results we expect, we get discouraged.
2. Haggai 2:6-9.

- a) They ran out of resources and the land did not produce much, so their morale became low. But God said in verse 8, “The gold and silver are Mine, I will provide.”
  - b) King Darius had cut the subsidy which was previously given by King Cyrus for the rebuilding of the Temple, but now God moved him to give the subsidy again. See Ezra 6:8-12, which is the same incident as that mentioned in verse 7 here. They were encouraged that God provided the finances.
3. Haggai 2:10-14.
- a) God questioned the priests about their holiness. You may wonder what does this have to do with the building of the Temple. They were building a holy temple but the people’s lives were unclean as they were exploiting others, etc.
  - b) It is like today’s Christians’ thinking that “if I touch something clean (e.g. give to the church), then my unclean things will become clean”. Do not think that when you do God’s work, it will cover up the sins in your life and think that your work will be blessed.
  - c) God also said that, not only touching clean things does not cause your unclean things to be clean but you will also contaminate the clean things. Some Christians give a lot of money to their church but they do horrible things at work, and then they use the dirty money to try to bless God’s work. God is not just concerned about doing holy projects, he is more concerned about whether we are living a holy life.
4. Haggai 2:15-19.
- a) God said, “Since you did all these (e.g. laying the foundation of the Temple, etc.) with wrong priorities in your hearts, I will not bless you”.
  - b) God said, “Thinking that you can continue to live a sinful life by building the Temple is wrong.”
  - c) Christians are not satisfied because God puts a drought on their works. But God said, “This day, if you get it right, your life will be blessed”.
5. Haggai 2:20-23.
- a) On the same day, another prophecy was given. In verse 23, the focus of the prophecy was then on Zerubbabel. God told him that though he was only a small governor at that time but one day God would destroy all the nations and Zerubbabel would be given a ring to signify that he was the king. Zerubbabel would be a representative of the Kingdom of God.
  - b) There seems to be no ending in Haggai but the ending is in the book of Revelation, when we will all live happily ever after.

What do we learn from the Book of Haggai?

1. God expects us to put Him first. It is the “best deal” in God’s economics. Matthew 6:33 says that if you put Him first, He will bless your home, health, kids, etc. and give you all that you need.
2. The book of Haggai is not an old story about Haggai but about the character of God. When reading the Bible, seek God first, not some verses to suit ourselves.

It should not be about how I feel about God but how God feels about me. Everything has to be God-centric. It should be “What does God want of me?” and not “What can I get from God?”

3. God is very concerned about the lives of His children. It is no different from earthly fathers who are more interested that his children’s lives are good and not how much they give to him. So, do not look at what I can do on Sunday, but what I am every day.