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MINISTRIES

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Minor Prophets, Major Messages | Haggai: Get Your Priorities Straight

The so-called “Minor Prophets” are a collection of twelve prophetic books in the Tanakh—that is, the Old Testament. Even though they are called the “Minor Prophets,” these books contain “major messages” that remain relevant to believers today. In this series, we will unpack the major messages of each Minor Prophet. We will discuss their practical applications for believers today and how they connect to the Messiah’s work and teachings in the New Testament.

In this teaching, we are looking at the Book of Haggai. Let’s begin.

Haggai: An Overview

Haggai prophesied during a difficult time for the people of Judah. Prior to Haggai’s time, Babylon had conquered Judah. The Babylonians destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and took the Judean people into captivity. Seventy years later, Babylon was conquered by the Persian Empire. The Persian king, Cyrus, declared that the Jewish exiles were permitted to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1-6). So, many of the exiles returned and began rebuilding the temple, but progress on the temple’s construction was slow, and by the time of Haggai, it had come to a complete halt. Moreover, Judah was facing extreme economic hardships at this time as well.

That is the historical background of Haggai’s prophecies (Ezra 5:1). The Book opens with Haggai rebuking the people for their indifference toward the reconstruction of the temple. He accuses them of investing time and resources in their own houses while neglecting God’s house:

Haggai 1:3-4

[Then the word of the LORD \[YHWH\] came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, “Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?”](#)

Haggai goes further to say that the people’s apathy toward rebuilding the temple was, in fact, the root cause of the economic hardships they were experiencing (see Deuteronomy 28:22-40):

Haggai 1:5-11

Now, therefore, thus says the LORD [YHWH] of hosts: Consider your ways. You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes. Thus says the LORD [YHWH] of hosts: Consider your ways. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the LORD [YHWH]. You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the LORD [YHWH] of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors.”

Upon hearing Haggai’s stern rebuke, the people heed the word of YHWH and resume construction on the temple (Haggai 1:12-15; cf. Ezra 5:1-2). Then, one month later (Haggai 2:1), Haggai once more speaks to the people of Judah and asks them to reflect upon the condition of the new temple they are building compared to the glory of the first temple that had been destroyed:

Haggai 2:3

Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?

Even though the present temple appears less magnificent compared to the glory of the first temple, Haggai tells the people not to be discouraged. He urges them to “be strong” (Haggai 2:4) and assures them that God’s Spirit remains in their midst, just as he was with them when they left Egypt (Haggai 2:5). Then, Haggai speaks of a future time when the glory of this new temple will surpass the glory of the former one:

Haggai 2:6-9

For thus says the LORD [YHWH] of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD [YHWH] of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD [YHWH] of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD [YHWH] of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD [YHWH] of hosts.”

Haggai’s prophecy regarding the use of treasures from various nations for the construction of this new temple appears to have been fulfilled not long after this prophecy was given. According to the Book of Ezra, the Persian king Darius gave some of his treasures to Judah to be used in the building of the temple (Ezra 6:6-8, 13-14). Several hundred years later, King Herod performed extensive renovations on the temple, using resources from the Roman Empire. By the time these renovations were done, the Jerusalem temple was one of the most impressive buildings in the world (See Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 130).

Two months after Haggai’s word about the temple’s future glory (Haggai 2:10), he delivers another word from YHWH. This time, he asks the priests a question concerning a matter of ritual purity:

Haggai 2:11-13

Thus says the LORD [YHWH] of hosts: Ask the priests about the law: “If someone carries holy

meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?" The priests answered and said, "No." Then Haggai said, "If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?" The priests answered and said, "It does become unclean."

So, according to the priests, if a person carries sanctified food in the fold of his garment and subsequently touches other foods, those other foods do *not* become sanctified. However, if a person becomes ritually impure due to contact with a corpse and then touches any of the mentioned foods, those foods *would* become ritually impure (see Numbers 19:22).

Haggai uses this concept of ritual purity as a metaphor. The point is that since the people had neglected the building of the temple, the work of their hands was considered unclean (Haggai 2:14-17). The offerings they made to God were considered defiled, and so God had not blessed them. However, now that they have repented and are actively rebuilding God's house, they can expect God's blessings (Haggai 2:18-19).

The Book of Haggai concludes with a prophecy directed specifically to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah:

Haggai 2:20-23

The word of the LORD [YHWH] came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, "Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother. On that day, declares the LORD [YHWH] of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the LORD [YHWH], and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the LORD [YHWH] of hosts."

God promises to "shake the heavens and the earth" and to "overthrow" earthly kingdoms. Then he declares that he will take Zerubbabel and make him like a signet ring. Ancient kings used signet rings to seal official documents. Anything sealed by the king's signet ring was considered to have the king's authority. Zerubbabel being YHWH's "signet ring," therefore, is an indication that what Zerubbabel did on earth was done with authority from YHWH in heaven. Here, Zerubbabel becomes a symbol of a future leader who will hold a prominent position of authority in the new age.

Haggai's Major Message

Haggai's major message centers on the importance of aligning our priorities with God's. During Haggai's time, the people were preoccupied with building their own houses while neglecting God's house—that is, the temple, where God's presence dwelled among them. Haggai urged the people to prioritize rebuilding the temple, emphasizing the need to seek God's presence above all other concerns in their lives.

Believers today are no different from the people of Judah in Haggai's time. It is easy to become consumed with the distractions and everyday concerns of life, often neglecting the things that God wants us to do. As a result, we often miss out on the blessings God has for us. Haggai reminds us that God has expectations of us, and we ought to prioritize his will in our lives.

For instance, just as Haggai admonished his listeners to build up God's physical temple, we are called to build up God's *spiritual* temple—the church. One way we build up the church is by making disciples of the nations (Matthew 28:19-20). The construction of God's spiritual temple is accomplished through people becoming disciples of the Messiah and living according to his ways:

1 Peter 2:4-5

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua].

As we can see, believers connected to the living stone—Yeshua—likewise become living stones that God builds into a spiritual house, a living temple where his Spirit dwells (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17). So, as Yeshua's disciples, our priority is to build up God's spiritual house, which includes making disciples of the nations and teaching them to obey God's ways.

Interesting Connections

Haggai prophesied that the second temple's glory would be greater than the first. He said:

Haggai 2:9

The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD [YHWH] of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD [YHWH] of hosts.”

While Haggai was originally contrasting the second temple with the first, today we might extend this hope to the future temple compared to the second. According to Ezekiel, there will be a glorious temple during the future Messianic age, which many identify as the time of the Messiah's millennial reign mentioned in Revelation 20:1-6. Like Haggai, Ezekiel prophesied that YHWH's glory would fill this new temple (Ezekiel 43:1-4) and that the construction of this new temple would be accompanied by blessings, peace, and prosperity (Ezekiel 47:1-12).

Like Haggai's original audience, we may find ourselves feeling discouraged about our present circumstances. Things aren't the way they should be in the world, and the lack of a temple in Jerusalem serves as a tangible reminder of that fact! It's a reminder that the Messianic age has not yet fully arrived, and God's kingdom has not yet been fully established on earth. Evil and injustice persist, along with sickness and death.

However, we have hope for the future. Even when it had reached its peak of material splendor, the second temple fell short in comparison to the glorious temple envisioned by Ezekiel. So, as we wait for the Messiah to return and establish this new temple, we can echo Haggai's hopeful word that the latter glory of God's house will surpass the glory of the former. And the appearance of that glorious new temple will serve as confirmation that the Messianic age has arrived at last.

How Haggai Points to the Messiah

One way that Haggai points to Yeshua is that, like Haggai, Yeshua had a zeal for the temple (John 2:17). He acknowledged that God “dwelled” there (Matthew 23:21) and called it his “Father's house” (John 2:16). Yeshua also said he is “greater” than the temple (Matthew 12:6). Some take this statement as an indication that Yeshua came to abolish the temple and thought of it as worthless, but that hardly makes

sense. That would mean Yeshua was saying he is greater than something that is worthless! His comparison with the temple makes sense only if he held the temple in high regard.

Another way that Haggai points to Yeshua is his prophecy about Zerubbabel, a descendant of King David. Haggai declared that Zerubbabel would represent YHWH's authority on earth. This prophecy finds its ultimate fulfillment in Yeshua, the Davidic King *par excellence*. Upon completing his work on the cross and achieving victory over sin and death, Yeshua ascended to heaven and was given all authority in heaven and on earth:

Matthew 28:18

And Jesus [Yeshua] came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

So, the ultimate Davidic king, Yeshua has all authority in heaven and on earth. The verses that follow tell us what *we* are to prioritize because of Yeshua's authority. Again, Yeshua commands us to make disciples of all nations and teach them everything he commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). As we work to make disciples, we are building up God's spiritual temple.

And that is Haggai's major message. Are your priorities aligned with God's priorities, or have you neglected the things that God wants you to focus on—in particular, building up God's spiritual temple? Haggai reminds us that there is blessing in obedience and in prioritizing God's will for our lives. Moreover, Haggai's prophecies remind us of the wonderful future that awaits us as believers. The Messiah was given all authority, and he will return to establish his kingdom on earth. It will be an age of abundant blessings and prosperity. There will even be a new temple there, and God's glory will fill the temple, and he will dwell among his people. So, as we look forward to the fulfillment of these wonderful promises, let's get to work doing the things that God told us to do—making disciples and teaching them God's ways.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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