

HAGGAI

How to Use This Discussion Guide with Your Group

Start with a prayer, and then read the introduction from the sheet. Read the portion of the text from your Bible or an app (use whatever translation you're comfortable with, but we suggest the New Living Translation (NLT) or the English Standard Version (ESV)). Then read the summary paragraph(s) and talk through the questions for that section. You can work through this guide in one session or spread it out over several – whatever works for your group. As you read and discuss, consider how what you're reading applies to your life today. Don't forget to close with prayer!

AN INTRODUCTION TO HAGGAI

Haggai is a prophet who urges Judah's leaders to rebuild the temple. The people have returned to Jerusalem after the years of exile in Babylon. They have restored their own houses, but the temple is still a ruin. Haggai explains to them that their failure to put God first is resulting in famine and poverty. His message is well received, and a temple is quickly built. Haggai is one of the few prophets who lives to see his words fulfilled.

Haggai dates his messages quite specifically. They are given to him by God between 29 August and 19 November 520 BC. As he calculates his dates by the reign of King Darius I, we realize that Judah is now just a small province in the great Persian empire.

Persia has replaced Babylon as the superpower. Darius I is Emperor Hystaspes of Persia, who reigned from 522–486 BC. It was one of his predecessors, Cyrus, who had given permission for the Jews to return to their land, in 536 BC, and allowed them to govern themselves once more.

In Cyrus' time there had been plans to rebuild the temple, but the work had lapsed. Persia was distracted by its own leadership struggle, which was eventually won by Darius. The Jews were harassed by their Samaritan neighbors and impoverished by poor harvests. People decided to look after themselves and establish their own homes, rather than face the task of rebuilding the temple.

GOD CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO BUILD THE TEMPLE AND THEY OBEY

Read 1:1–15 in your Bible.

Haggai's first message is for Zerubbabel and Joshua. Zerubbabel is the governor of Judah, and Joshua is the high priest's son.

Zerubbabel is a descendant of King David, grandson of Jehoiachin (the last king of Judah) and heir of the royal line. His name means 'seed of Babylon'. He and Joshua had returned from exile with the first group, led by Sheshbazzar, in 537 BC. It was Zerubbabel and Joshua who had organized the

laying of the temple foundations, but the work has been at a standstill for sixteen years. (This episode is narrated in Ezra 3.)

Haggai's message contrasts the fine new houses with the state of the temple. People have proudly paneled the walls of their homes, but have neglected to bring timber for the Lord's house. They have excused themselves by saying it isn't the right time.

Haggai calls them to review their way of life. Times are hard. People don't have enough to eat and drink. Their clothes don't keep them warm. Their money goes nowhere ... He explains that all this is happening because they have neglected God's house. Worship and lifestyle go together. It is the time to build the temple!

THREE MONTHS IN THE LIGHT OF ETERNITY

Haggai's recorded ministry spans only three months of 520 BC, but his words break a lethargy which has lasted sixteen years. The prophet has a remarkable ministry of challenge and encouragement.

Haggai urges the people building the temple to see its long term significance. It isn't just for the prestige of the nation, but for the glory of God. It won't matter that the new temple isn't as impressive as Solomon's. The important thing is that God himself will bring splendor to the building, because it is his house (2:6-9).

Zerubbabel, Joshua and all the people are inspired by God's word to them through Haggai. The work on the temple begins.¹

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR 1:1-15

Start talking.

1. As a child, what did you enjoy building: train sets? Tinker toys? Legos? Tree houses? Forts? Who were your teammates in this?

Start digging.

2. Why do you think Haggai chose to speak to both the civil and religious leaders? And why on "the first day" of that particular month and year (Aug 29, 520 BC)?
3. After 18 years of starts and stops in rebuilding the temple since returning from Exile, "this house remains in ruin" (v. 4). Why is that? To what are the people to "give careful thought" (vv 5-8)?
4. How did they respond to Haggai's call (v. 12)? Who lead their response? How soon did they begin (v. 15)?
5. How did God enable this (vv. 12-14)?

Start applying.

6. When have you been part of a communal building project: Church? Village? Barn-raising? What part did you play? How was the community built up at the same time? How did God move during the project?
7. How has God spoken to you about your financial priorities and spending habits? Have you seen “famines” or fruitfulness in your personal finances?
8. When have you put your wages into a “purse with holes in it”? How did that feel? What will you do about that hole?

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT, TEACHING AND PROMISE

Read 2:1–23 in your Bible.

GOD WILL GLORIFY THE NEW TEMPLE (2:1-9)

The work has been going on for a month, when God’s word comes to Haggai again. This time it is to encourage the builders. They may feel that their effort is poor when compared with the splendid temple of Solomon. But God is with them. The point of the temple is not human fame, but God’s glory. God intends to make this house a focus of his glory for all nations. He will fill it with his presence and peace.¹

1. How long have the people been working (1:15; 2:1)? What have the people been doing during this seventh month (see Leviticus 23:23-43)?
2. Why does Haggai speak now?
3. What feelings does Solomon’s temple evoke (vv. 3-5)? How does God’s command and covenant relate to this?
4. God “shaking the heavens, earth ... nations” refers to what events (vv 6-7; see Exodus 8ff; Hebrews 12:26-27)?
5. “The desired of all nations” refers to what? When will this be (vv.7ff)?
6. What dream of yours has shattered recently? Do comparisons with past successes help? How might God be building you into a temple of His glory?

A NEW START (2:10-19)

Two months later, Haggai has a particular question for the priests. Does touching something holy make a person holy? Obviously, the answer is, ‘No.’ In the same way, building the temple won’t in itself change the people’s lives. If they don’t mend their ways, they will still be diseased by sin.

Haggai reminds the people of the shortages which prompted them to listen to the Lord, and resulted in the new work on the temple. From this point on, God promises to bless them.¹

1. In your home, what spreads itself: Cleanliness or messes? Give an example.
2. At winter planting time (v 10), what does Haggai have to say?
3. *Consecration* does *not* rub off, but defilement does (vv. 10, 13). What *holy* work were the people trusting in that would *not* rub off on their fruitfulness or moral character, much to their chagrin (vv. 14ff)?
4. Who is “this people” whom Haggai accuses (v 14; see Ezra 4:1-5)? (With friends like these Samaritans, who needs enemies?)
5. What thematic ties do you see between 2:15-19 and 1:10-11? Between 2:15-19 and 2:10-14?
6. Since crops have only just been planted (vv 10, 19), how can Haggai assure Judah of God’s blessing?
7. When have you been tempted to trust in a holy work, as did Judah?

A MESSAGE FOR ZERUBBABEL (2:20-23)

On the same day, Haggai has a special word for Zerubbabel (2:20–23). God is going to cause havoc among nations and between peoples. In this upheaval, Zerubbabel will emerge as God’s chosen servant and leader.

History doesn’t tell us Zerubbabel’s fate, but here is God’s endorsement of the royal line which will lead on down the centuries—to Jesus Christ.¹

1. How much time has elapsed (v. 20; compare 1:1)? How much longer before the job is done (see Ezra 6:15)?
2. In this last oracle, what will happen? When? Why?
3. What biblical events does this day recall (see Genesis 19:25; Exodus 15:1, 4, 19, 21; Judges 7:22)?
4. What does Haggai say here about God’s power over world governments?
5. What part of your spiritual life has God begun to rebuild? How can your church/small group figure into that? How long will this rebuilding take place?
6. As the son of David and of Zerubbabel (see Matthew 1:1, 12), how is Christ “like God’s signet ring” (v. 23)? As a follower of Jesus, how are you also like God’s signet ring?
7. From Haggai, what can you apply to growing your church?

¹ Andrew Knowles, [The Bible Guide](#) (1st Augsburg books ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 388.