

First Things First! (Haggai)



SABBATH—JUNE 1

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Haggai 1; John 2:19; Ezra 3:1–6; Matthew 1:23; Matthew 12:6; Haggai 2; Luke 24:13–27.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘The silver belongs to me. So does the gold,’ announces the LORD” (Haggai 2:8, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: Haggai's message is simple: What are the things that are important to us? And why is it important to put these things first in our lives?

HAGGAI'S BOOK IS ONE OF THE SHORTEST BOOKS IN THE BIBLE. It was written at an important time in the history of Judah. The Jews had returned from their slavery in Babylon almost twenty years before. But they seemed to have forgotten the reason for their return. They let God's temple sit in ruins while they were building their own houses.

So, Haggai encourages the Jews who have returned to give careful thought to their situation. Haggai's message is simple but makes a lot of sense. The people have worked hard but do not earn much. This is because they have not put God first in all that they are doing. As Jesus Himself said, “Put God's kingdom first. Do what he wants you to do. Then all of those things will also be given to you” (Matthew 6:33, NlrV).

Today, too, it is so easy to get too busy with life. Then we forget what the most important thing is, which is to always do the Lord's will.

SUNDAY—JUNE 2**PLANTING MUCH, HARVESTING
(GATHERING) LITTLE
(Haggai 1:1–11)**

Read Haggai 1:1–11. What is happening? More important, why is it happening? Even more important, how might this same principle (important rule) be happening to us today? How might we be guilty of doing the same thing?

“For over a year the temple was left alone and almost forgotten. The people lived in their homes and worked hard to make a living. But their situation was terrible. They worked hard, but they did not have comfortable lives. Nature seemed to be against them. Because they had let the temple lie in ruins, the Lord sent a drought [no rain]. God had given them the fruits of field and garden, the corn and the wine and the oil, as an example of His favor. But because the people had used these bountiful [many] gifts so selfishly, the blessings were removed.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets [Special Messengers] and Kings*, page 573.

Haggai scolded the people about their situation. Fruitless (unsuccessful) labor was one of the curses caused by the breaking of God’s covenant (agreement) (Leviticus 26:16, 20). If the people did not put God first in their lives, then they would not be able to live in comfort.

Haggai had great love for the Lord’s temple. He wanted the people to fin-

ish building the temple right away. Haggai’s ambition was very different from the lazy people who did not care about the temple. They were more interested in their own houses.



The people were more interested in their own houses than in God’s.

The Lord used Haggai to turn the people’s hearts toward God. This was because God could not be honored as long as His house sat in ruins. The temple in Jerusalem symbolized (stood for) the home of God among fallen (sinful) humans. The temple was a witness to the whole world that the Lord is the Ruler of heaven and earth. How could the children of Israel witness to the true God when the very symbol of that God (read John 2:19; Matthew 26:61) was in ruins? In many ways, the people’s attitude (feeling) toward the temple showed a deeper spiritual problem. The problem was that the people had lost their sense of doing God’s work.

Do you see any warning here for us?



God could not be honored as long as His house sat in ruins.

MONDAY—JUNE 3

GOD'S GREATEST PROMISE (Haggai 1:12–14)

Read Haggai 1:12–14. Notice the people's sense of unity (oneness) of purpose here. Why is that so important?

This time the leaders and people quickly obey Haggai's message. They make preparations, gather materials, and re-start work on the temple three weeks later. Within a week they build an altar and begin offering sacrifices to God again (Ezra 3:1–6). In less than five years the temple is finished.

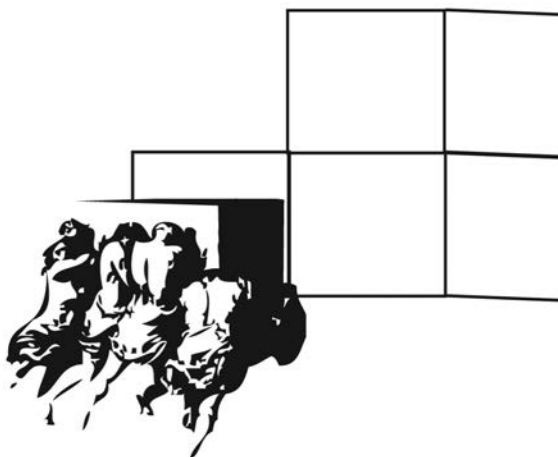
The kingdom of God cannot be just a material (physical) building in itself. But the book of Haggai is a reminder that God sometimes uses material things, such as buildings, for spiritual purposes.

A prophet's message is success-

ful if people quickly obey it. If this is true, then Haggai stands out as one of the most successful prophets. Haggai's preaching moved the people to action. Within a month, work on the temple started again with God's prophets promising the people that the Lord would help them.

Haggai 1:12–14 reports that the leaders and the people have accepted Haggai's message. All obeyed the Lord because they recognized that He had sent Haggai. They "obeyed the LORD" (verse 12, NIV). They showed this by worshiping Him and giving Him special attention. So, Haggai now could deliver a new word from the Lord: " 'I am with you' " (verse 13). As soon as the people decided to obey the Lord, He encouraged them instead of scolding them. God's presence gave them the promise of all other blessings. His saying " 'I am with you' " goes back to the promises that God made during the time of the early Bible leaders and Moses (Genesis 26:3; Exodus 3:12; Numbers 14:9).

Of course, the greatest example of God's being "with" us is Jesus (read Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23; and Matthew 28:20). Think deeply about the fact that Jesus is the Creator and Ruler of the universe and that He lived among us. What does that tell us about how important we are in a universe that is so big that we easily can think of ourselves as unimportant nothings? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.



Within one month, the work on God's temple started again.

TUESDAY—JUNE 4

DO NOT FEAR! (Haggai 2:1–5)

Haggai 2:1–5 gives an interesting picture of the great revival (new life) that was taking place among God's people. About a month after the temple work began, God sends an encouraging word through Haggai to the people who have determined (decided) to rebuild God's house. Haggai asks the elders how the temple looks in comparison with Solomon's temple that had been destroyed by Babylon. Clearly, the present temple did not equal the former glory. People may have been discouraged because they could not copy the glory of Solomon's temple that had once stood in the same place.

But Haggai encourages the people to keep working because God's Spirit is with them. He calls on all members of the Jewish community to be strong and to work hard because God Almighty was with them. Haggai's

words to the leaders, "be strong" and "do not fear" (NKJV), sound like the Lord's words to Joshua after the death of Moses (Joshua 1:5–9). The smaller and weaker Israel was, the greater its need for faith in God. The prophet (Haggai) announced that the Lord would make the temple's latter (later) glory greater than its former (earlier) glory. That became true because One (Jesus) greater than the temple had come (read Matthew 12:6).

The Holy Spirit continued to support God's kingdom by His presence in Israel. The Spirit of God had guided Moses and the elders and had sent forth the prophets with inspired (God-given) messages. Now He was among the Jewish people again. And the answer of the leaders and the people gave proof that they had obeyed God faithfully. The Spirit was present in renewing them and in bringing them closer to their God. The presence of the Spirit also brought many blessings to the people. So, the prophet encourages the people to do their part in God's work so that He can fulfill (keep) His promises.

Haggai preached God's Word to people who knew how rough life could be. They knew the disappointment of unfulfilled hope. He turned their attention to God, who is faithful and who expects His people to be responsible citizens of His kingdom. They were to keep doing good. In doing so, they would find true meaning and purpose in their lives.

A 35-year-old man who had given

up on belief in God wrote a 1,900-page suicide note before killing himself. In his note, he wrote: “Every word, every thought, and every emotion [strong feeling] comes back to one basic problem: life means nothing.” How does our belief in God and our willingness to obey Him give our life meaning?

WEDNESDAY—JUNE 5

THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS (Haggai 2:6–9)

Read Haggai 2:6–9. What is being promised here? And how is it going to be fulfilled (kept)?

God used Haggai to announce a great earthshaking of nations on the day of the Lord. This will take place when the temple is filled with God’s presence. The prophet called on his fellowmen to think beyond life’s problems and hardships. He called on them to think about the future glory of God’s kingdom.

The main reason for the glory of the temple of Jerusalem was to make it worthy of God. But this verse shows that the Lord was willing to come to the less-than-glorious house and bring glory to it. The people did not need to worry about how they would finance the temple’s rebuilding. All treasures belong to God, who had promised to live in this new temple. The Lord Himself was the One who gave the

temple its glory.

“The people did their part with God’s power in their hearts and lives. At the same time, God sent message after message to them through Haggai and Zechariah with many promises. He promised that the people’s faith would be richly rewarded and that the future glory of the temple would not fail. In this very building Jesus would appear at the right time. Jesus was the Desire of all nations and the Teacher and Saviour of humankind.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 577.

God promised that the glory of the present temple would be greater than the glory of the former temple. It would be a different kind of glory because this temple would be honored by Jesus’ being there in person. By being there, Christ would make the glory of the new temple greater than the glory of Solomon’s temple.

Read Hebrews 8:1–5. The earthly temple might be filled with Christ’s glory. But we never must forget that it was only a shadow (example). It was a symbol (word-picture) of the plan of salvation. Think about what that means. For example, right now Jesus is working for us in the heavenly sanctuary (house of God). And it is the one made by God, not man. How can we learn to better understand why the sanctuary message (what Jesus is doing for us right now) is important in the plan of salvation?



Jesus would one day honor this temple by being there in person.

THURSDAY—JUNE 6

THE LORD'S RING WITH THE ROYAL SEAL (Haggai 2:23)

The last message from the Lord to Haggai was given on the same day as the message before it. They were to work together (read Haggai 2:22, 23). The Lord warned that kingdoms and nations would be destroyed during the day of God's judgment. But on that same day, Haggai said, the servant of the Lord would successfully finish God's work of salvation. We can best understand this to be truly fulfilled (completed) at the Second Coming.

Israel's political leader is connected with the glorious time of its own King David. This is because he is to come through the line of David. For example, Zerubbabel was a grandson of King Jehoiachin and the rightful heir to David's throne after the Jewish people's return to Jerusalem from Babylon. Zerubbabel served as

governor of Judah under the Persian king Darius the Great. He also was a leader behind the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. And Joshua was the high priest who also helped to rebuild the temple.

The prophet said that Zerubbabel would be the Lord's ring with His royal seal on it. A king's ring is proof of royal authority and ownership. For example, a king seals legal documents with wax stamped with his ring. In the same way, the Lord would "seal" the entire world through the work of His servant. Zerubbabel's key role in the rebuilding of the temple should not be judged as unimportant. But he did not bring to pass all of the promises given to him by God through Haggai. The inspired Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) point to the person and ministry (work done for God) of Jesus Christ. Christ was the son of both David and Zerubbabel. He was the final (complete) fulfillment of all the promises found in the Bible about the Messiah.

Read Luke 24:13–27. Focus on (pay attention to) Christ's words to the two men. What important message is He giving to them? How do His words show us the importance of understanding Old Testament prophecy (special messages from God)? Why is it so important for Christians even today?

FRIDAY—JUNE 7

ADDITIONAL STUDY: "Even this dark hour was not without hope for

those whose trust was in God. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah were raised up [chosen] to meet the problem. In powerful messages Haggai and Zechariah showed the people the cause of their troubles. The prophets said that the people failed because they neglected to [did not] put God's interests first. Suppose the Israelites had honored God by making the building of His house their first work. Then they would have invited Him to be with them and give them His blessing."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pages 573, 574.

"The second temple was not honored with the cloud of God's glory. But the temple was honored by Jesus, who was God Himself in the flesh. The 'Desire of all nations' [Jesus] had come to His temple when the Man of Nazareth taught and healed in the holy temple courts. Through Christ, the second temple is better than the first in glory."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy [War]*, page 24.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① In class, discuss your answer to

Monday's question about Jesus' being on earth. Think deeply about not just His being on earth but also His self-sacrifice for the sins of the world. Think through what these things mean about how important we are.

② Isaiah talks about the proud king of Babylon who made "the earth tremble and shook kingdoms" (Isaiah 14:16, 17, NKJV). How different is that shaking from the Lord's action as described by Haggai in chapter 2 of his book?

③ Israelites who lived in Bible times often disobeyed the messages preached by God's prophets. Prepare to share with your class members how God's people are not accepting His messages today.

④ The Bible is very clear: during Bible times the temple of Israel and its system of sacrifices lost its meaning after the death of Jesus. What do Hebrews 8 and 9 tell about the things that Christ has done and is doing for us that the early sanctuary (house of God) never could?