

Sermon Notes and Discussion Questions: Revision - Stop & Consider

What are some of your major priorities in life? How do you determine what should be a priority?

Family. Kids. Work. Church. Friendships. That “to do” task you never find time for. If you’re like most, far too many things compete for your time and energy. We have to choose what’s most important because there’s simply not enough time to do everything. Then, some days are still too busy.

Choosing priorities isn’t just reserved for today’s society. In the Book of Haggai, we encounter a group of people whose priorities were misplaced: God’s people living in Jerusalem in 520 BC.

In 538 BC, Cyrus permitted exiled Jews to return to their homeland. This important decree gave the Jews freedom to not only travel home to Judah, but to also rebuild the temple. This was no small matter of celebration. Psalm 126:1-3 offers a glimpse into their joy at being back in the land of their forefathers. Happy to be home, the people set to work rebuilding their country. Work began on the temple in 536, but by 520 the commitment to the work had waned. The foundation had been laid, but work stalled after opposition arose from Judah’s enemies (Ezra 4:1-5,24).

The Book of Haggai opens in the “second year of King Darius” (1:1). By verse 3, the Lord had spoken to Haggai and given him a message for the Jewish believers: “The word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: ‘Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?’” (vv. 3-4). The Lord gave this message to Haggai to deliver to His people: they were to commit themselves to finish rebuilding the temple. It was time and it was to be their priority.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ HAGGAI 1:2-8.

**How can we determine what priority we’ve given God in our lives?
What excuses do we sometimes make to delay obedience?
What have you recently done for the primary purpose of obeying God and bringing Him glory?**

In this short book of the Bible, we find four brief messages the Lord gave Haggai to deliver to the people. To ensure the people would know the source of the instruction, verse 2 begins with, “The LORD of Armies says this . . .” This phrase is repeated throughout Haggai’s four sermons, emphasizing the magnitude of the message.

Haggai's first message was clear: finish building the temple. But this instruction came with additional directions. The people were to "think carefully about [their] ways" (v. 5). Some consideration of their current list of priorities was needed. Were they fully following God's ways? Had they been obedient to what He called them to? This was a call to contemplate the direction of their lives. The building of the temple had stalled. Was this an indication of a deeper issue? Were they fully committed to the Lord?

In verse 8, we find the first positive part of Haggai's message: "Go up into the hills, bring down lumber, and build the house; and I will be pleased with it and be glorified." The temple would be a symbol of God's presence among His people and where they would worship Him. Having a finished temple would bring glory to God and be a witness to other nations that they were God's people. Finally, a completed temple would be pleasing to the Lord.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ HAGGAI 2:1-5.

How would you summarize God's instruction to His people in these verses? What did He specifically promise them? When have you felt like God has called you to accomplish a specific task? When has God's presence empowered you to take a step of obedience to Him?

God stirred the hearts of His people and they obeyed, setting to work on the temple just twenty-three days after Haggai called them to rebuild. But this time was not free of opposition or discouragement. In verse 3, we read of some who compared the temple to the former one, Solomon's temple. Still, God gave Haggai a second message to encourage the people: God's Spirit would be with them to ensure their success.

Three different times God's word to the people was, "Be strong" (v. 4). They were to be bold and fully committed to this work and to the Lord. While the task before them was a significant one, they did not labor alone. God would be with them. God reminded them of His covenant relationship with them in verse 5: "This is the promise I made to you when you came out of Egypt, and my Spirit is present among you; don't be afraid." They were His people; He would be with them in the task. They had nothing to fear.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ HAGGAI 2:6-9.

Why is it significant that the Lord promised to provide the resources needed to complete the temple rebuilding project? What God-given task have you put off saying yes to? What steps of obedience can you take today? What do these verses teach us about God's relationship with His people?

In this final part of Haggai's second message to the Jews, the Lord promised to provide what they would need to complete the task. He also ensured that this temple would not

be inferior to the former one, Solomon's temple, but would be filled with His glory. The people would see God's power at work in their midst.

God, in His power and authority, would provide the finances needed to complete the building project. "The silver and gold belong to me" (v. 8). All of the wealth in all of the lands ultimately belonged to God. He would ensure that the temple was properly adorned, a fitting display of His glory. To emphasize the importance of the task before them, the Lord declared: "The final glory of this house will be greater than the first" (v. 9). Indeed, Jesus, the very presence of God incarnate, would one day be present in this temple (Luke 2:25-38). Their task of rebuilding the temple, one they had begun years earlier, had been met with opposition and stalled. Now, the Lord declared the importance of this work.

In verse 9, the Lord gave the people a reassuring promise: "I will provide peace in this place." Scholars consider the term "place" a reference to possibly both the temple itself and the city of Jerusalem. While surrounded by hostile neighbors, the people would experience peace. God is a covenant God, providing for His people year after year. In the short Book of Haggai, this deep commitment is seen: God Himself would be with His people, He would help them as they set out to complete the task He gave, and He would bless them with peace.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Which of God's promises to His people in today's study most resonates with you? Why?

What obstacles prevent you from being fully committed to the Lord?

How can we practically place God first in our lives?

PRAYER

Close your group time in prayer. Thank God for the guidance He provides, as well as His provision and presence. Praise Him for being the Lord of Armies, the One who holds all authority in heaven and earth.