

this week's big idea

God exposes false stories before replacing them with his own.

getting started

Think of a time you were sure you knew what someone meant — a text, a look, a comment, an email that went unanswered — and later found out you had read it completely wrong. What story had you told yourself?

in the text

Read Haggai 2:1-3 aloud together

Observation

1. Verse 1 gives a date. Compare it with the date in 1:15. How long have the people been working? Then read 1 Kings 8:2. What had happened at this same time of year, four centuries earlier?
2. Who does God speak to in verse 2? Compare that with who he spoke to in 1:1, and who responded in 1:12. Who is included now from the very beginning?
3. Verse 3 asks three questions. Which one looks at the past, which one looks at the present, and which one asks for a conclusion? What are all three questions asking the people to do?

discussion questions

4. Read Ezra 3:10–13. When the foundation of this temple was laid, the older people who had seen Solomon's temple wept, while others shouted for joy. Why might the same sight produce opposite reactions? Where has a memory of "how it used to be" become the measuring stick for something in your life?

5. The group that remembered the old temple was small, but they were priests, Levites and heads of families. Read Numbers 13:30-33. Ten spies told a story — “we seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes” — and a whole nation believed it. How can a few voices shape a whole community’s story? Whose voices shape the stories you tell, and whose story are you shaping

6. On Sunday we said God doesn’t argue with what they see: the building really is smaller. But “smaller” is a fact, and “nothing” is a conclusion. Read Proverbs 3:5-6. Where are you looking at something in your life and saying “it seems like nothing”? What story have you attached to it, and what would it look like to bring that story to God before you settle on it?

praying the scriptures

Using God's very words in Scripture as the basis of our prayers is a wonderful way to give glory to God! It also serves as inspiration or a springboard to include our own words. For instance, in Psalm 23, one might pray the Scripture by saying, "God, King David wrote, 'The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.' And I thank you Jesus that you are MY shepherd too. Because I have you, I have everything I need. I love you and I praise you!" Then, the next group member can take verse two, and so on, and so forth. Practice praying Psalm 84 in your group. Each member take a verse or two (depending on group size), and pray God's word out loud. Let it inform how you pray and what you pray about. Consider closing your time of prayer by singing the Doxology:

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.*

notes on the text

1. The date. The work began on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month (1:15). This word comes on the twenty-first day of the seventh, twenty-seven days later. It falls during the Feast of Tabernacles, the same festival at which Solomon dedicated the first temple (1 Kings 8:2).
2. The audience. Zerubbabel the governor, Joshua the high priest, and "the remnant of the people." In 1:1 the word came to the two leaders, and the people were addressed only indirectly. Now the same three groups who responded in 1:12 are addressed together from the start
3. Three questions. The past: "Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory?" The present: "How does it look to you now?" The conclusion: "Does it not seem to you like nothing?" Each question is about their seeing: who saw it, how they see it now, and what it is "in your eyes."

Background

The twenty-first day of the seventh month was 17 October 520 BC, twenty-seven days after the work began (1:15). It was the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Ingathering, a festival of joy and thanksgiving for the harvest (Leviticus 23:34; Exodus 23:16). It was also the feast at which Solomon had dedicated the first temple (1 Kings 8:2). So a people who had just come through years of failed harvests (1:6)

were celebrating God's abundance while standing in rubble, at the very feast when the old temple had been filled with glory.

Verse 3 is built on sight. "Who of you is left who saw (רָאָה *rā'â*) this house?" "How are you seeing it now?" (literally). And where our Bibles say "Does it not seem to you like nothing?", the Hebrew says literally "Is it not as nothing in your eyes?" (כַּיֵּן יַעֲבֹד *bə'ênêkem*). God does not dispute what they see. He points to the conclusion they have drawn from it.