

this week's big idea

The people's futility had nothing to do with how hard they worked; God himself was withholding the harvest while his house lay in ruins.

getting started

Tell us about something you kept putting time or money into that never seemed to get any better — a car, a garden, a house project, a system at work. What finally happened?

in the text

Read Haggai 1:5-11 aloud together

Observation

1. Verse 6 lists five things the people did and what came of each one. Name all five pairs.
2. In verse 8, what three things does God tell them to do — and what reason does he give for doing them? Notice whose benefit the reason names.
3. Look carefully at verses 9–11. Who does the text say is behind the shortfall? Then go back through verses 2–9 and count how many times God is called “the LORD Almighty.”

discussion questions

4. Read Deuteronomy 28:38 beside Haggai 1:6. The same two words — “much” and “little” — appear in both. What changes when you realize the people's hardship was covenant language and not bad luck?
5. Verse 9 says each of them was “running” to his own house while God's house sat in ruins. Nobody in that town ever decided to push God aside — it happened one reasonable season at a time. Where has God quietly moved to the back burner in your life, not by any decision you made, but by drift?

6. Haggai 1:6 names eating, drinking and clothing. Read Matthew 6:31–33, which names the same three in the same order, and ends with “seek first his kingdom.” What is the practical difference between adding God to a full life and actually putting him first in it — and what would have to move?

closing

In your group, use a simple “check-in”: go one individual at a time in brief fashion (1–2 minutes per person) to say one thing you are thankful for, and one thing you want prayer for. The person to your left listens to your check-in and then briefly prays for you out loud. Then it’s their turn to “check-in” and receive prayer from the person to their left. Continue the process until everyone has participated. For greater efficiency in large groups, divide in half or consider praying in triads.

notes on the text

1. The five pairs. Planted much / harvested little. Eat / never have enough. Drink / never have your fill. Put on clothes / are not warm. Earn wages / put them in a purse with holes. Notice the movement: the field, the table, the cup, the body, the purse — and the last one is the only one where they succeeded and still lost it.
2. The three commands. Go up into the mountains, bring down timber, build the house. The reason God gives is his own: “so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored.” He does not promise them relief.
3. Who is behind it, and how often he is named. God himself: “What you brought home, I blew away” (v. 9); “because of you the heavens have withheld their dew” (v. 10); “I called for a drought” (v. 11). And he is called “the LORD Almighty” four times in verses 2–9 — the title was there the whole time, including on the “Why?” itself.

Background

This was not a starving community. They still reaped, ate, drank, dressed and earned — there was simply never enough of any of it. The wage image sharpens the point: a day laborer carried his pay in a small pouch tied at the waist, and a pierced purse meant the money was gone before it could do any good. Darius’s early tax reforms had pushed prices up across the province, so whatever a family carried back from Babylon was worth less

every year. These were working people who could not get ahead. There is also a piece of wordplay running underneath the passage. The word for God's house lying "in ruins" is ḥārēb. The word for the drought God calls down in verse 11 is ḥōreb — the same consonants. A desolate house, a desolate land

