

this week's big idea

The people's claim that it was not yet time to build God's house is disproved by the finished houses they were already living in.

getting started

What is something you have been meaning to get to that you still have not gotten to? Nothing heavy - a garage, a phone call, a project that has been "almost started" for a while.

in the text

Read Haggai 1:1-4 aloud together

Observation

1. Verse 1 names two men and gives a date. Who are they, what offices do they hold, and when is this happening?
2. In verse 2, what exactly do the people say? Whose words are these - the people's, Haggai's or the LORD's?
3. In verse 4, two houses are set side by side. What word describes each one?

Interpretation

4. Verse 1 addresses the governor and the high priest, but verse 4 says "you yourselves". Who is actually being confronted - and why might God begin with the leaders?
5. God answers the people's claim with a question rather than a correction. What can a question accomplish that a direct accusation cannot?

discussion questions

6. The people had real reasons: Jeremiah's seventy years were not up, the economy was brutal, and the prophets had assured them God was with them in Babylon without any temple at all. Which of their reasons do you find most persuasive?

7. Sunday's message said that "not yet" almost never feels like a decision at the time - a refusal closes a door, but "not yet" leaves it open. Where have you found that to be true?
8. "If someone examined your schedule, your spending, your conversations, your commitments - what would they conclude you are building?" Sit with this one before anybody answers.
9. In the New Testament, God's house is no longer timber and stone. Read 1 Peter 2:4-5. What changes when "God's house" means people rather than a building?

shared response

Go around the group. Each person names all three:

- One thing you have been saying "not yet" to that belongs to God's work in you.
- One step you will take this week - specific enough that somebody could ask you about it.
- Who in this group will ask you about it, and when.

closing scripture

Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV)

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

In your group, use a simple "check-in": go one individual at a time in brief fashion 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. **Who, and when.** Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. The date is the second year of King Darius, first day of the sixth month - 520 BC, roughly eighteen years after Cyrus authorized the return.

2. **Whose words.** “The time has not yet come for the LORD’s house to be built.” They are the people’s own words, quoted back to them by the LORD through Haggai: “This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘These people say...’”
3. **The two houses.** The people’s houses are “paneled” - finished, covered, lived in. The LORD’s house “remains a ruin.”

Background - why these two names matter

Zerubbabel and Joshua are not simply the officials in charge. Zerubbabel is the son of Shealtiel and grandson of Jehoiachin — also called Jeconiah — the second to last king of Judah. The royal line of David is standing in Jerusalem again. His name means “seed of Babylon,” marking him as a child of the exile. Joshua traces his line through Jehozadak and Zadok back to Aaron: the legitimate high priestly line, unbroken through the exile.

Put the two together and the point of verse 1 comes into focus. The same two offices that stood behind Solomon’s temple — a son of David and a son of Aaron — are both present, both named, and both addressed before Haggai says a word about building. Naming them establishes that this project carries the same standing the first one did. It is not a private initiative. It is the rebuilding of the LORD’s house by the LORD’s appointed leadership.

That is part of why the confrontation in verse 4 lands as hard as it does. Nothing was missing. The authorization was in place, the leadership was in place, the priesthood was in place. What was missing was the will to begin.

facilitator notes

Question 8 is the hinge. Resist filling the silence — it is designed to be uncomfortable for a moment.

Question 6 matters more than it looks. The point of the sermon was that these people were sincere, not cynical, and a group that decides too quickly that the exiles were simply lazy will miss themselves in the passage.

The prayer section will run 20–30 minutes in a group of ten. Divide or use triads as the instructions allow, or place it at the opening if your group prefers to pray before discussing.

If someone has read 1 Chronicles 3 closely they may point out that verse 19 lists Zerubbabel as a son of Pedaiah rather than Shealtiel. Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Matthew all consistently call him “son of Shealtiel,” and that is the line the guide follows. It is a known difficulty, not an error in the handout — worth acknowledging rather than deflecting if it comes up.

