FIRST THINGS FIRST

THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

Misplaced Priorities

November 1, 2026

> 4 *"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"*

Haggai 1:4 (read verses 1-11)

In 520 BC, nearly two decades after Jewish exiles began returning from Babylon, Judah remained a small province under Persian rule. Jerusalem's temple, destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC, lay in ruins. Although reconstruction had begun, opposition and economic hardship had stalled the work. The people were rebuilding their lives in a diminished homeland, uncertain about their future.

Haggai addresses both Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest (v. 1), emphasizing the importance of spiritual renewal for the entire community. The people insisted that the time had not come to rebuild the Lord's house (v. 2). Haggai challenges their reasoning: why were they living in paneled houses while God's house remained desolate (v. 4)? The problem was not providing for their families, but allowing personal concerns to displace their responsibility to God and their community.

Twice, Haggai commands the people to "consider" their ways (v. 5, 7). Their disappointing harvests, inadequate food, and unfulfilled labor (v. 6) reveal a troubling disconnect between their efforts and their well-being. Haggai interprets these hardships as God's covenant discipline, echoing warnings in Deuteronomy about the consequences of unfaithfulness.

The temple represented God's presence among his people and their identity as a covenant community. For believers today, Haggai invites us to examine whether personal ambitions, financial concerns, and daily responsibilities have crowded out our commitment to worship, service, and God's mission. The challenge is to align our priorities with our professed faith and allow God to shape our lives around what matters most.

Small Group Guide

November 1, 2026

What did you hear in this morning's message that stood out to you? What was interesting, important, or confusing?

What might be crowding out your commitment to God?

When do responsibilities become excuses for neglecting God?

How can we prioritize God's purposes over personal preferences?

Some Background

Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and its temple in 586 BC, and deported many of its people into exile. This catastrophe followed years of rebellion and spiritual unfaithfulness, despite repeated prophetic warnings. The destruction disrupted Jewish worship, national identity, and life in their ancestral land. After Persia conquered Babylon (539 BC), Cyrus permitted Jews to return and rebuild the temple. However, the returnees faced a damaged city, ruined temple, and economic hardship. Judah was a small province without real independence. Nearly twenty years after the first return, temple reconstruction remained unfinished. Haggai challenged the people to reconsider their priorities and restore the temple as the center of their worship and communal identity.

Reflections

Haggai's zeal to rebuild the temple was matched by his passionate message to the Jews who recently returned to the land. Their mission was to rebuild the temple, but no real work had occurred on the site for years. The joyous return to Jerusalem as predicted by Isaiah wasn't exactly what they experienced. Yes, they joyfully returned, but were faced with many difficulties. It's always difficult to rebuild after a massive catastrophe. The retuned Jews were struggling as a nondescript, small province under Persian rule. Where was the glory? The day-to-day struggle for survival trumped any building program. And yet, this indicated that they had lost their sense of priorities. Without God's real presence life cannot flourish. To what extend are we, also, more focused on our immediate concerns and forget God?