

Haggai 1:14 NIV - 14 So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God,

The people feared God and obeyed Him. And God stirred up the spirits of the governor, priest, and the people. God's Holy Spirit (*rûah*) who breathed life into existence, stirred up (roused or awakened) their spirits (*rûah*) empowering them to begin rebuilding. Their strength and courage to begin came from God.

Has God ever stirred your spirit to undertake something for His kingdom? Was this something you did alone or with others? Were there obstacles to overcome? Describe your journey.

WRAP-UP

The remnant of Israel returned to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. But after starting well, things got hard. During drought, opposition and economic hardships they decided to care for themselves first. They lost faith in God to provide for them and their priorities shifted from God's kingdom to their own needs and desires. But God sent Haggai with the message, "your efforts will fail as long as you put yourselves ahead of God." That is a message we all need to hear. Once they heard, feared, and obeyed God, He stirred up their spirits to begin rebuilding anew.

MEMORY VERSE.

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."
-Matthew 16:24 NIV*

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life

Challenge- Read through the entire book of Haggai this week. Both chapters.

"Courage to Begin"

Haggai – week 1

INTRODUCTION

You might not be familiar with the book of Haggai. It is one of the shortest books in the Old Testament- just two chapters long. But in it, God gives us insight into what happened during the Israelites return from Babylonian exile, and where courage can be found to start, to move forward, to be faithful and to trust God for new beginnings. In this week's study we find the remnant of Israelites in Jerusalem, 70 years after their exile to Babylon. They had rebuilt the altar and foundation of the temple but then things got hard, and their priorities drifted. Sound familiar? In our first look into Haggai, we see how the Israelites found the courage to begin rebuilding the temple.

Ice Breaker

Do you have any big projects you have been putting off for a while, or any projects that you recently started?

Key Passage

Haggai 1:14 NLT - 14 So the LORD sparked the enthusiasm of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the enthusiasm of Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the enthusiasm of the whole remnant of God's people. They began to work on the house of their God, the LORD of Heaven's Armies,

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What We Really Prioritize

Haggai 1:3-4 NLT - 3 Then the LORD sent this message through the prophet Haggai: 4 "Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins?"

Chances are pretty good that, if asked, “What is your highest priority?”, you would say “God”. It is almost certain that would have been the answer of the remnant who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. After all, most had been born in Babylon and had homes and jobs there but chose to return to rebuild their ruined homeland and temple. They got started well, but somewhere along the way they met resistance, things got hard and instead of working to rebuild the temple, they put their time and resources into building their own homes.

Look at the question God asks through the prophet Haggai (1:4). What did the Israelites give as a reason they rebuilt their own houses before rebuilding God’s house (Hag 1:2)? What do you think they were waiting for that would indicate it was time to rebuild?

Matthew 6:30-33 NLT - 30 And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? 31 "So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' 32 These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. 33 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

Jesus addressed His disciples’ priorities in Matthew chapter 6. These men had walked away from the security of their jobs and homes to follow Jesus, but they still worried about how their needs would be met. Worrying about providing for themselves distracted them from focusing on God’s Kingdom.

To what does Jesus attribute the source of their worries? In what way is worrying a form of unbelief or lack of faith? What is the solution to their worry (v. 33)? How does this parallel what we see in Haggai?

2. See What’s Happening

Haggai 1:9-10 NLT - 9 You hoped for rich harvests, but they were poor. And when you brought your harvest home, I blew it away. Why? Because my house lies in ruins, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, while all of you are busy building your own fine houses. 10 It's because of you that the heavens withhold the dew and the earth produces no crops.

This passage reminds us that there are consequences to our choices. Sometimes they are natural consequences, but sometimes God intervenes to get our attention, as He did here.

What were these people pinning their hopes on? If God had allowed them to have an abundant harvest while they neglected Him, where do you think they would have focused after that harvest?

Trusting God by making Him our priority goes against what our culture reinforces. “Stand on your own two feet” and “God helps those who help themselves” are not in the Bible. But those attitudes can drive us to pursue things through our own strength and for our own benefit without seeking God.

Matthew 16:24-25 NIV - 24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.

Are there some things in your life that have yielded disappointing results despite your best efforts? Do they draw you nearer to God or further from Him? It is possible your priorities are out of order. Is there anything you believe God has called you to do that has been neglected? Ready to deny yourself if God shows you a different path to take? If so, then ask yourself, in what ways have I been so focused on myself that I have ignored God.

3. Putting God First

Haggai 1:12-13 NLT - 12 Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of God's people began to obey the message from the LORD their God. When they heard the words of the prophet Haggai, whom the LORD their God had sent, the people feared the LORD. 13 Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave the people this message from the LORD: "I am with you, says the LORD!"

The people finally “heard” God’s word. It wasn’t that they hadn’t been told, but now they finally acted on what they were hearing. There is a big difference between knowing what God says and allowing it to move you to action. When they “heard the words” the people feared the Lord. They recognized God’s power and they respected and responded in obedience. The temple may have been missing, but Haggai’s message was that God was still with them. (v. 13).