

Major Lessons from Minor Prophets

First Things First! (Haggai)

Lesson #10 for June 8, 2013

Scriptures: Haggai 1; 2; John 2:19; Ezra 3:1-6; Matthew 1:23; 12:6; Luke 24:13-27.

1. Haggai's short book of only two chapters is all about priorities. What are our priorities? Take a look at the chronology surrounding the experiences of Haggai and Zechariah:

August 536,535 B.C. (1% of Jews returned with Zerubbabel and company to Jerusalem)

August 29, 520 B.C. (Haggai 1:1);

September 15, 520 B.C. (Haggai 1:15);

October 17, 520 B.C. (Haggai 2:1); and

December 18, 520 B.C. (Haggai 2:10 and Haggai 2:20).

March 12, 515 B.C. (Ezra 6:15) - Temple finished.

All four oracles of Haggai are precisely dated in the year 520 B.C., the second year of the reign of Darius I (521-486 B.C.), king of Persia. The first oracle was delivered on the first day of Elul (August-September), the second on the twenty-first day of Tishri (September-October), and the last two on the twenty-fourth day of Kislev (November-December). Later the messages were compiled into what is now known as the Book of Haggai. For the historical background of the book, see Ezra 1-7. (*Believer's Study Bible*) [Compare *The Anchor Bible*, Haggai, Zechariah 1-8, p. xlvi] [Haggai may have seen Solomon's temple which was destroyed in 586 B.C. Some think Haggai was born in Babylon.]

2. Haggai's book, one of the shortest in the Bible, was written at a critical time in the life of Judah. The exiles had returned from their captivity in Babylon almost twenty years before; yet, they seemed to have forgotten the reason for their return. They let God's temple sit in ruins while they devoted their energy to building their own houses. *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for June 1, 2013. [And what are we doing today? Do we pay a faithful tithe?]

3. Read Haggai 1.

For over a year the temple was neglected and well-nigh forsaken. The people dwelt in their homes and strove to attain temporal prosperity, but their situation was deplorable. Work as they might they did not prosper. The very elements of nature seemed to conspire against them. Because they had let the temple lie waste, the Lord sent upon their substance a wasting drought. God had bestowed upon them the fruits of field and garden, the corn and the wine and the oil, as a token of His favor; but because they had used these bountiful gifts so selfishly, the blessings were removed.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 573.

4. Does God actually send drought? Does He take away blessings, even allowing people to starve if they do not do what He wants them to do? Does that sound like a God of love? Is it important for us to keep our priorities straight? Had God warned them what would happen if they ignored Him? (Leviticus 26:16,20) Are you comfortable with these words from God? Is this the "health and wealth" gospel?
5. In last week's lesson, we noticed that there were people in Zephaniah's day claiming that God would never do anything—neither good nor bad. (Zephaniah 1:12) Well, God certainly did something! They went into Babylonian captivity; and then in Haggai's day, they were brought back. But, they were acting like they were just as ignorant of God's plan for them as their ancestors had been. Do you see any warning for us?
6. In Haggai's day, the question was about building God's temple in Jerusalem. After returning from Babylon, they had built a small altar presumably on the bare rock on Mount Moriah to give

offerings to God. But, years had gone by and no further progress was made, partially because of the opposition of their neighbors.

7. But then, suddenly, Haggai and Zechariah appeared and began speaking on God's behalf. In a very short period of time—about three and half months—Haggai gave four messages to the people and one message personally to Zerubbabel. The work on the temple began; and people did what they could; and in a period of about four years, the temple was completed.
8. Apparently, Haggai and Zechariah were two of the most immediately successful of the prophets of Old Testament times. Note that the book of Haggai consists of five messages: Haggai 1:1-15; 2:1-9; 2:10-19; and 2:20-23; and finally, there was a fifth message for Zerubbabel. Only Jonah and Nehemiah rivaled the success of these two!
9. Read Haggai 1:12-14. Did God's statement, "I am with you" remind them of those earlier statements in Genesis 26:3; Exodus 3:12; and Numbers 14:9? Were these personal messages?
10. Today, do we act as if God is with us? Of course, the greatest manifestation of God being with us as a human family was when Jesus came down to this earth. (See Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23; 28:20) Why does God care so much about this tiny blue marble in space? One day—after the millennium—God will make our world the headquarters for the universe!
11. Read Haggai 2:1-5. The people had begun to lay the foundations for the new temple. Remembering the magnificent glory of Solomon's Temple, the older people wept as they saw this one by comparison. (Ezra 3:12; Haggai 2:3) They realized they would never be able to build another temple like Solomon's.
12. But, God had great plans for this new temple! At the dedication of the tent-tabernacle in the wilderness, God's presence had descended to fill it so that not even Moses could go inside. A similar occurrence happened at the dedication of Solomon's Temple. But, this temple, later massively expanded to become Herod's Temple, did not have any of the special manifestation of God's Spirit at its dedication. There was no covenant box in the most holy place; there was no altar of incense and no table of showbread. But, this temple was to be more glorious than even Solomon's magnificent temple. (See Exodus 40:34,35; Numbers 9:15,16; 1 Kings 8:10,11; Isaiah 6:4; Ezekiel 43:4,5; Revelation 15:8; Matthew 12:6)
13. What is God trying to teach us in Haggai 2:6-9? How could that new temple be more glorious?

But the second temple had not equaled the first in magnificence; nor was it hallowed by those visible tokens of the divine presence which pertained to the first temple. There was no manifestation of supernatural power to mark its dedication. No cloud of glory was seen to fill the newly erected sanctuary. No fire from heaven descended to consume the sacrifice upon its altar. **The Shekinah no longer abode between the cherubim in the most holy place; the ark, the mercy seat, and the tables of the testimony were not to be found therein. No voice sounded from heaven to make known to the inquiring priest the will of Jehovah.**

For centuries the Jews had vainly endeavored to show wherein the promise of God given by Haggai had been fulfilled; yet pride and unbelief blinded their minds to the true meaning of the prophet's words. **The second temple was not honored with the cloud of Jehovah's glory, but with the living presence of One in whom dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily—who was God Himself manifest in the flesh.** The "Desire of all nations" had indeed come to His temple when the Man of Nazareth taught and healed in the sacred courts. **In the presence of Christ, and in this only, did the second temple exceed the first in glory.** But Israel had put from her the proffered Gift of heaven. With the humble Teacher who had that day passed out from its golden gate, the glory had forever departed from the temple. Already were the Saviour's words fulfilled: "Your house is left unto you desolate." Matthew 23:38. *Great Controversy* 24.1,2

What did Jesus do in the temple? He was surrounded by people listening to Him teach!

14. The book of Haggai was all about rebuilding the temple or sanctuary of God in ancient Jerusalem. But, the earthly sanctuaries were never more than a shadow of the heavenly sanctuary. What is happening in the heavenly sanctuary right now? (Hebrews 8:1-5) Is it important to our understanding of God?
15. Read Luke 24:13-27. Jesus said here and also in Luke 24:44 and John 5:39 that we are supposed to learn important lessons from the Old Testament. What are those lessons?
16. Anyone who has spent any amount of time studying the Old Testament carefully realizes how often and how completely the children of Israel departed from God's plan for them. It has now been almost 170 years since the great disappointment of 1844. How are we doing in fulfilling God's plan for us?
17. In Haggai's day, inspired by the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah, the people came together and despite their financial difficulties managed to finish the temple in Jerusalem. Do we need Haggais and Zechariahs in our day? How often do we allow the urgencies in our day-to-day lives to eclipse the more important matters of eternity? Is it more important to put food in our mouths, roofs over our heads, and clothes on our backs than it is to prepare for the second coming of Christ? Is the Devil really an expert at keeping us busy?
18. Haggai implied that God sent drought in his day. What would be the equivalent today?
19. We believe that God knows very well what is going to happen in the future. Why do you think God sent Haggai, Zechariah, Zerubbabel, and Joshua the high priest, and then later Ezra and Nehemiah, to urge the people to proceed with the building of the temple, the rebuilding of the walls, and inspire this great revival and reformation if He knew that when His Son came not too many years in the future, they would reject Him? What do you understand God to be trying to accomplish during that whole period? And what does that say about God?
20. Galatians 4:4 suggests that Jesus arrived "when the fullness of time had come" (*KJV, NKJV*); or "when the appointed time arrived" (*Jewish New Testament*); or "when the right time came" (*TLB, The Living Translation*); or "when the time had fully come" (*RSV, NIV*); or "when the time was right" (*CEV*); or "when the time arrived that was set by God the Father" (*The Message*). This suggests that God was looking for something in particular. Was it that people were more sinful? If so, then why not come before the flood? (Genesis 6:5) The Jews in Jesus day had given up fertility cult worship, gross idolatry, intermarriage with the heathen, and they had successfully rebuilt the temple once again into a wonderful structure—with the help of Herod and Caesar's money. God knew this was coming.
21. Even before it happened, God understood all that was going to occur. He knew that they would leave all their gross external immorality and become the most strict "law-abiding" group that ever lived on planet earth! They had to ritually clean themselves after returning from the market in case they had somehow come in contact with a Gentile and ritually contaminated themselves! (Mark 7:1-5) Is it possible that they were just as difficult for God to reach and influence as their idolatrous ancestors? When their ancestors had the Scriptures read to them, they experienced a great revival and reformation. (2 Kings 22,23; Nehemiah 8) In Jesus' day, they read and memorized the Scriptures daily. But when He appeared, they accused Him of being possessed by a Demon! (John 8:48)
22. **This might suggest that those who are very "religious" and "saintly" are actually, at times, farther from God than the more flagrant sinners!** Is God trying to show us that the ditch is just as deep on each side of the road? **This is very hard for modern Christians to accept because we immediately recognize that we are much more like the Pharisees than we are like the idolatrous and immoral Jews in the Old Testament. It is always much easier to point a finger at those who are quite different from what we are than it is to recognize that there might be some terrible sinners that look just like us!** The question that must be faced in such situations is: Are we any better? Do we have more light? We do not even like to think about it! We like to think that we are much better than "those sinners" in the Old Testament!

23. God is doing His best to warn us of all the possible hazards. He would like to keep us from the gross sinfulness of the ancient peoples; but, He would also like to prevent us from being caught up in the much subtler and more dangerous sins of pride, self-righteousness, and spiritual superiority that characterized the Jews of the New Testament.
24. What were God's objectives in rebuilding the temple if He knew what was coming? If an angel had stopped to ask, "God, what are You planning to accomplish through this rebuilding of the temple? How will you 'succeed'?" How do you think God would have answered? At that point in history, what would have been success in the eyes of an angel? What was God waiting for? What is He waiting for now? Are we so settled into the truth that we cannot be moved?
25. That is really an expansion of the previous question. God is seeking to bring this whole "sin experiment" that we call the great controversy to a conclusion in such a way that no one will ever want to try any of the avenues of sin ever again. In order to do this, God must allow sin in all its forms to play itself out in this "theater of the universe" (1 Corinthians 4:9) until it has been adequately demonstrated that sin in every form has terrible and deadly consequences. If this is not thoroughly demonstrated before the entire universe and recorded in a form that can be reviewed and understood by all, there is the possibility that someday, someone may again get the idea that sin is not so bad or that there is sufficient reason for challenging the way God runs His universe. If such a thing should ever occur again, then the demonstration has been inadequate. So, God waits to allow sin to work its deadly results on all who refuse to come back to Him. It is the only way He can secure the universe against apostasy and rebellion for all time to come. It was necessary for Him to go through all that He has gone through to accomplish this. It is hard to imagine God doing many of the things that He has done unless there was a very good reason for doing so. We have no way of knowing how early the angels began to understand all of this; but, some of it was not clear until Calvary. (DA 764)
26. It is God's plan to establish a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells. He will not have any jails, nor any police force, FBI, CIA, KGB, nor any such group. He refuses to be constantly checking in people's refrigerators, bedrooms, or libraries to make sure that they are not doing something that they are not supposed to do! Nor will He run the risk of having the whole great controversy start all over again! So, He will only be able to admit into His kingdom people who are so convinced of the truth and the advantages of doing what is right simply because it is right that they will never be tempted to go back to sin in any form. Then, God's kingdom will be safe and secure for eternity. People will be doing right because it is right!
27. Was God saying, "If you don't worship Me and Me first, I can't bless you"? (Haggai 1:2-11) If so, would that suggest that God is selfish? Who stands to gain the most if we put God first? We do! Why are people blessed when they put God first? Is it because God does not like it when they do not put Him first; and therefore, He withholds His blessings? Or, by putting God first, do we open up ways for God to bless us that would not otherwise be open?
28. Repeatedly, we have seen the contrast made between our extremely intelligent and powerful Yahweh-God (Isaiah 40:9-26) and the useless, powerless chunks of wood, stone, or metal that the heathen called their gods. (Isaiah 44:6-20; 1 Kings 18:20-40) We have noted the consequences of worshiping those false deities. (2 Kings 17:15; Hosea 9:10 [compare Numbers 25:1-5]; Psalms 115:8; Jeremiah 2:5,17,18; 7:6; 2 Corinthians 3:18) When we worship and admire something or Someone, we become like that person or thing. This is the way the mind works. You will become like what you fill your mind with. (GC 555) So, it is self-destructive for us to admire or worship anything short of our wonderful God. God will not punish us for doing it. We will just lose! As God has dealt with His erring children, there have been times when He has sent floods, plagues, droughts, etc. to try to get people to realize what they were doing and turn back to Him.

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