

The Priorities of Judah Haggai 1:1-8

Background

Doctrinal Points

1. A believer's first priority should not be dwelling in paneled houses.
2. A believer's first priority should be doing the work of the Lord.

Practical Application

1. Don't put your money into a bag with holes.

Questions

1. Haggai was a minor prophet. Does this mean he was less spiritual or less inspired than the major prophets?
2. Haggai is a post-exilic prophet. What does this mean?
3. Who destroyed the magnificent temple of Solomon and took the Jews captive to Babylon?
4. How does Cyrus, the Persian Emperor, fit into this picture?
5. What good thing did the people do when they returned to their homeland?
6. Why and for how long was the rebuilding of the temple delayed?
7. Why did Haggai preach his series of fiery sermons?

Answers

1. Not at all. It means simply that he wrote a short book.
2. It means that he prophesied after the seventy-year captivity (exile) of the Jews in Babylon.
3. In 586 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians conquered the kingdom of Judah. They destroyed Solomon's temple and took the Jews captive to Babylon.
4. In 539 B.C., Babylon fell to the Persians. In 538 B.C., Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland and even to rebuild their temple. About 50,000 Jews returned under Zerubbabel's leadership.
5. They rebuilt the altar for sacrifice and laid the foundation for the temple.
6. Opposition and threats from the surrounding Persian provinces caused fear and discouragement. The work was delayed for about fifteen years. Meanwhile, the people lost interest in rebuilding the temple and become more interested in rebuilding and beautifying their own houses.
7. To motivate the Jews to re-order their priorities and finish the temple.

Discuss / Consider

1. Read Haggai 1:3-4. The point of the question Haggai posed to the people was not the matter of paneling, but a matter of priorities. The Lord would say the same to us today. Are you more concerned with beautifying your house than seeing the work of the Lord move ahead? What are your priorities? Where is your heart? *"...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* (Matthew 6:19-21)
2. Read Haggai 1:7-8. The Lord does not say that believers should not have nice houses, but that their priorities need to be in order. When beautiful houses and materialism take precedence over the work of the Lord, a believer needs to take a hard look at his priorities. How involved are you in serving the Lord?

Challenge

1. Do you ever feel like you are putting your money into a bag with holes? Look at the big picture to determine your priorities.
2. See 1 John 2:17. Is the Lord pleased with your priorities?

Good Results of Haggai's First Sermon to Judah Haggai 1:9-15

Background

Doctrinal Points

- 1. Wrong priorities result in loss of blessing.**
- 2. Right priorities result in lots of blessing.**

Practical Application

- 1. Will this minor prophet affect your major priorities?**

Questions

1. When did Haggai give his challenging sermons?
2. What changed the hearts of the returned exiles and delayed the rebuilding of the temple?
3. What did it take to get the people to start rebuilding the Lord's house?
4. How long was the period of time between Haggai's first sermon and the rebuilding of the temple?
5. How long did it take from the start of the rebuilding until the temple was completed?
6. This temple was the second Jewish temple. Which king expanded and beautified it?
7. Who destroyed this temple? When?

Answers

1. In 520 B.C.
2. They became discouraged because of opposition and threats of those around them. They became lethargic in the work of the Lord, and focused on their own homes instead of the Lord's house.
3. The motivating ministry of Haggai and Zechariah. See Ezra 5:1-2.house?
4. Twenty-three days.
5. Four years. See Ezra 6:14-16.
6. Herod the Great expanded and beautified the temple around the time of Christ.
7. In 70 A.D., the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. Read the prediction by the Lord Jesus to His disciples concerning this destruction in Matthew 24:1-2.

Discuss / Consider

1. Review Haggai 1:9-11, Leviticus 26:19-20, and Deuteronomy 28:38-40. Why was the Lord withholding His blessings from His people? In the Old Testament, God gave material blessings to those who put Him first. In New Testament times and today God promises spiritual blessings to those who put Him first. Do you want the Lord's blessing on your life? Do you want the fruit of the Spirit to be seen in you? How can you fully enjoy the spiritual blessings that are yours in Christ? By putting the Lord first in all your decisions and actions.
2. Review Haggai 1:12-14. The people listened to Haggai's sermon, then they acted on it. They had a complete change of heart, reversing their priorities from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. One of the greatest blessings from the Lord is His presence, both then and now. See Haggai 1:13 and Hebrews 13:5. Do you know the intimate presence of the Lord in your life in day to day living?

Challenge

1. Will this minor prophet affect your major priorities? Are your priorities in line with the word of God? When you meet Haggai in heaven, how would you answer his question, "How did my book affect you?"

Haggai's Second Sermon to Judah **Haggai 2:1-9**

Background

Doctrinal Points

- 1. The presence of the Lord is more important than the glory of the place.**
- 2. The coming of the Lord will bring greater glory and peace.**

Practical Application

- 1. Remember, God has unlimited resources.**

Questions

1. What is the theme of the Book of Haggai?
2. Why would Cyrus, a pagan king, issue a decree allowing the Jewish captives in Babylon to return to Jerusalem?
3. Why was the pagan Cyrus called God's shepherd?
4. What is the lesson here for us?
5. Why did God raise up Haggai to speak to His people?

Answers

1. "Rebuilding the Temple."
2. Cyrus wanted to appease all the gods, to win their favor. More importantly, God was using Cyrus to accomplish His sovereign and divine purposes.
3. Not because he was a believer, but because God was using him to direct the Jews back to Israel where He wanted them.
4. God can use even pagan kings to accomplish His purpose in our lives.
5. When the people became discouraged and stopped rebuilding the temple, God raised up Haggai to preach a series of sermons to motivate the people to get their priorities right and to start the rebuilding again.

Discuss / Consider

1. Review Haggai 2:3-5. Some of the Jews who were involved in rebuilding the temple had seen the glory of Solomon's temple before it was destroyed. Because of the comparison some of them were discouraged. Do comparisons discourage you in your service for the Lord? Look to the Lord and seek His guidance for your unique role and contribution to the kingdom.
2. God said, *"I will fill this temple with My glory."* These verses have Messianic significance. Their ultimate fulfillment will be at the second coming of Christ. The signs are in place. Are you anticipating the Lord's coming with joy?

Challenge

1. God reminds us that all the silver and gold are His. His resources are unlimited. He could have made the temple even more beautiful than Solomon's temple. Instead, He chose to teach the people the lesson that it was their heart, not the glory of the temple that counts most. What service has the Lord called you to do? Remember that God is in charge, and He will provide as you walk by faith and step out in faith.

Haggai's Third Sermon to Judah **Haggai 2:10-19**

Background

Doctrinal Points

- 1. There is a significant difference between sanctification and defilement.**
- 2. There is a significant difference between worship and religion.**

Practical Application

- 1. You don't have to wait for blessing.**

Questions

1. Refer to Jeremiah 25:4-11 and Jeremiah 29:10. What did the Lord predict through the prophet Jeremiah?
2. How long was the period of captivity, and how can it be calculated?
3. What was the rebuilt temple called?
4. How long were the Jews back in Jerusalem before the temple was completed?
5. Why did the people stop rebuilding for a while?
6. What prompted the people to start rebuilding again?
7. What was the purpose of Haggai's series of four sermons?

Answers

1. Jeremiah first predicted that the Jews would spend seventy years as captives in Babylon for their sins against the Lord. The second prediction was that the people would return to their homeland.
2. It was a period of seventy years. It can be figured from the time that Daniel and others were taken to Babylon in 605 B.C.
3. Zerubbabel's Temple
4. Twenty years
5. Out of fear, discouragement, and reversed priorities.
6. The motivating and prophetic ministries of Haggai and Zechariah.
7. To stir up and challenge the people to begin rebuilding the temple.

Discuss / Consider

1. There was no transfer of sanctification (cleanness, holiness) according to the law. Defilement (uncleanness), however, was transferred according to the law. For example, a healthy person doesn't transfer his health to a diseased person, but a diseased can transfer his disease to a healthy person. The same is true in the moral area. Bad company corrupts good morals.

2. Haggai drew the distinction between sanctification and defilement to point out to the Jews that even though they had been bringing sacrifices while the temple was in ruins, it was not true worship. Their hearts were not in it and they were just going through "religious" motions. Such activity was unacceptable to God. When there was a change of heart, when they got right with the Lord, there was true worship and obedience, and their actions proved it. Are you involved in true worship or religious activity?

Challenge

1. The people of Haggai's day had a change of heart and their priorities were set in order. The Lord rewarded them even before the rebuilding was completed. The same is true now— spiritual blessings are available to every Christian now. From this day forward, set your priorities in order and you will be blessed.

Haggai's Fourth and Final Sermon

Haggai 2:20-23

Background

Doctrinal Points

1. There will be a great shake-up in the future.
2. There will be a great Sovereign in the future.

Practical Application

1. Are you ready for the future?

Questions

1. List the three post-exilic prophets who wrote books in the Old Testament.
2. Who did they prophesy to and when?
3. What is the important event found in 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 and Ezra 1?
4. When did Haggai give his four fiery sermons? Why did he give them?
5. What words introduce each sermon?
6. Who in particular was the fourth and final sermon addressed to? What was the intent of this message?

Answers

1. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.
2. To the Jewish people after they had returned from the seventy-year captivity in Babylon.
3. The edict of Cyrus, King of Persia, that allowed the Jews in Babylon to return to their homeland.
4. Haggai gave his sermon in 520 B.C., to stir up the people, to exhort them, and to encourage them to complete the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem.
5. Each sermon was introduced by “The word of the Lord came to Haggai.”
6. To Zerubbabel. It was meant to encourage Zerubbabel in his faithful and courageous service. See Haggai 2:20-21.

Discuss / Consider

1. Read Haggai 1:21-22, *“I will shake heaven and earth...”* Commentators believe that this time is associated with the Lord’s second coming. Read about the signs our Lord gave in the Olivet Discourse (Luke 21:24-27). For a more graphic description of these times, read Daniel 2:44, Revelation 16, and Zechariah 12:4. Out of this great shake-up will come our Lord’s glorious reign. This was encouraging to Zerubbabel. Is it encouraging to you that the Lord and His Kingdom will one day be supreme?

2. *“Zerubbabel will be made a signet ring.”* (Haggai 2:23) In ancient days signet rings were used as a seal of authority. Zerubbabel was being promised a place of authority in the future. Most commentators see this as prefiguring Christ, the coming King. This promise encouraged Zerubbabel, it should also encourage us.

Challenge

1. It seems that current events are moving quickly toward end times. Are you ready for the future? Do you know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? Are you, as a Christian, living your life with eternity in view?