

RESTORING THE BROKEN

A Study of Ezra and Nehemiah

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At the end of last week's passage we read that the work on the temple had come to a standstill (Ezra 4:24); in response, God sent the prophet Haggai (Ezra 5:1).

Read the book of Haggai (chapters 1 and 2).

Throughout the book we will see Haggai speak on specific dates. Each of these corresponds to an occasion on which the people gathered together. The first prophecy God sends through Haggai (chapter 1) finds the people gathered in public worship at the monthly New Moon celebration.

1. The second year of the reign of King Darius was 520 BC. Darius re-established stability in Persia after a period of political turmoil following King Cyrus's death in battle.
 - a. What did the remnant in Jerusalem encounter during the years between Cyrus and Darius? (Ezra 4:4-5)

THE REMNANT

Haggai 1 refers to those who returned from exile as the "remnant of the people" (1:12). This remnant consists of "the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites - and everyone whose heart God had moved" (Ezra 1:5).

- b. What did the remnant conclude as a result? (Hag. 1:2)

2. The people had spent fifteen years building and settling into their "paneled houses" (Hag. 1:4). They were living in comfort in their completed houses.
 - a. Whose house were these people called to Jerusalem to rebuild? (Ezra 1:2-3, 5)

FAMILY LINES

Governor Zerubbabel was of the royal line of David. He was the grandson of Jehoiachin, the last of the kings of Judah who had been dethroned and taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. High priest Joshua was a direct descendant of Aaron the Levite.¹

- b. What is the condition of that house? (Hag. 1:3)

3. Instead of rebuking the people harshly, what does the Lord ask the people to do? (Hag. 1:5, 7)

4. These people of the remnant obeyed when God moved their hearts (Ezra 1:5), and left the prosperous cities of their exile to return to the ruined city of Jerusalem.
 - a. What might God's people have expected when they obeyed his commands? (Hag. 1:9a; Lev. 26:3-12)

 - b. What are the people of God in Jerusalem experiencing instead? (Hag. 1:6, 9a)

 - c. Why? (Hag. 1:9b)

5. Verse six gives a vivid description of the people's discontentment. They have not been lazy but have been "busy" (Hag. 1:9) with the work of their own houses. The returning people of God have let the instability of their times and their neighbors' opposition distract them from their original priority.

Can you think of a time you were busy, but still felt like you "never [had] enough" (Hag. 1:6)? If you find yourself overwhelmed with busyness and discontentment, take some time to "give careful thought to your ways" (Hag. 1:7) and pray, asking God to show you if you've been distracted from his priorities for your life.

6. The people respond to Haggai's prophecy by fearing and obeying the Lord.
 - a. What enables them to respond quickly to the prophecy? (Hag. 1:13-14)


 - b. How are we as believers in Christ able to obey the will of God? (Phil. 1:6; 2:12-13; 2 Cor. 3:5-6; Heb. 13:20-21)

Reread Haggai 2:1-9.

"On the twenty-first day of the seventh month" (Hag. 2:1) the people are celebrating Sukkot (or the Feast of Tabernacles), a time when they thanked God for his provision of that year's harvest and for his faithfulness during their exodus from Egypt and their wandering through the wilderness. On the last day of this feast Haggai delivers his second message from the Lord. A month has passed since work on the temple restarted.

7. There are three major festivals in the seventh month during which no work could be done. God's people have been obedient in restarting work on the temple and also obedient in resting from work, even though it may have seemed very frustrating to repeatedly delay progress just as soon as they started.

Instead of sugar-coating the reality of their rebuilding efforts, God acknowledges the sorry condition of the temple and gives voice to the questions that the people were thinking (Hag. 2:3). Read through 1 Kings 6 to get a sense of the grandeur of Solomon's Temple that the remnant now sees in ruins. Note down or sketch some of the beautiful details of that building to get a sense of the "former glory" (Hag. 2:3) being mourned.

8. Even though the new temple is disappointing compared to Solomon's, God still commands his people to be strong, work, and not fear. What enables God's people to live and work with strength and without fear? (Hag. 2:4-5;  1 Kgs. 6:11-13)
9. This rebuilding effort has little to none of the craftsmanship, time, and resources of Solomon's building project. Nevertheless, what promised future glory will come to this temple that outwardly is less impressive than Solomon's? (Zech. 2:5; Lk. 2:21-38)

Reread Haggai 2:10-23.

This time Haggai speaks to the people as they gather for the winter planting season.

10. Haggai is sent to ask the priests two questions on the interpretation of the law. He wants them to "give careful thought" (Hag. 2:15, 18) to the principles that consecration (holiness) cannot be transferred or caught by touch, but defilement (contamination by sin) passes way too easily to everything it comes into contact with. Given this principle, why do you think God needs to repeat again and again his command to "give careful thought"?

11. This book began with God withholding his blessing from his people because of their disobedience. What promise does he now make? (Hag. 2:19c)

12. The final word of the Lord given to Haggai is for Zerubbabel, the grandson of King Jehoiachin.

a. What had the Lord said to Jehoiachin just before he was carried away from Jerusalem into exile? (Jer. 22:24-27)

b. How does the word of God to Jehoiachin in Jeremiah contrast with his word to Zerubbabel here in Haggai? (Hag. 2:21-23)

13. Zerubbabel has been quick to lead the people he has been given authority to govern back to obedience. What do the following passages tell us about Jesus, Zerubbabel's descendant (Mt. 1:12-16)? Dan. 7:13-14

2 Sam. 7:11b-12, 16

Rev. 5

SIGNET RING

“Such a ring was a costly item and may have been worn on the finger or round the neck on a chain; either way, it was always attached closely to its owner, and would never be lost or abandoned. ... It seems that such rings were used to stamp the royal seal on a document.”²

In verse 21 God says, “I am going to shake the heavens and the earth.” Hebrews 12:27 explains that when God does this, it is for the purpose of “removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.”

This study has been adapted and expanded with permission from a study of the same name by Bridge Community Church, Phila., PA.

 * For further study

¹ Robert L. Alden, “Haggai,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, Volume 7, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 579.

² David F. Pennant, “Haggai,” in *New Bible Commentary 21st Century Edition*, eds. D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, and G. J. Wenham (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 862.