



February 16, 2020

“Look Beneath the Surface”

Haggai 1 - 2

Pastor Gary Hamrick

We often treat people or react to people based on what we see “on the surface.” But what if we got to know their story on a personal level and found out about their heart and soul? We would probably be more encouraging and have a lot more compassion for them. We never know what’s going on in a person’s life – the heartaches, the personal struggles, the disappointments, the failures, etc. Those things lay beneath the surface. But what if we could draw out those things in a way that resulted in genuine, Christ-like compassion for them? Wouldn’t that reflect Jesus better than reacting and getting frustrated about someone’s actions or behaviour? This is the angle that Pastor Gary takes in his message from the book of Haggai, and he shares a personal experience about an encounter with a woman who suffered in Auschwitz at the hands of the Nazis, whom the Lord used to teach him about these truths.

1. In Hebrew Haggai’s name is spelled Chaggai, which means feast or festive.
2. Haggai prophesied in 520 B.C. to the Jewish people in Jerusalem after their return from the seventy-year exile in Babylon.
3. Haggai’s ministry was short, lasting only from August 29 to December 18, 520 B.C.
4. The events of the book of Haggai fit within the timeframe of the book of Ezra.
5. Haggai’s passion, which is also the main theme of the book, was to motivate the people to rebuild the Temple and to flourish in a right relationship with God.
6. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, who wrote the last three books of the Old Testament, are known as post-exilic prophets.

7. It's important to understand the timeline of events.
 - a. 606 B.C. – The Babylonians came to besiege Judah.
 - i. The Babylonians came as the rod of God's judgment to purge the Jews of idolatry and to eliminate the monarchy.
 - b. 586 B.C. – After twenty years the Babylonians overwhelmed Jerusalem, and they destroyed the Temple of God.
 - i. During this time the Babylonians took captive thousands and thousands of Jews, and they sent them to Babylon some 900 miles away.
 - c. The Persians and the Medes overthrew the Babylonians.
 - d. 538 B.C. – King Cyrus of Persia issued a decree that gave permission for the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the Temple.
 - e. 536 B.C. – The Jews laid the foundation for the Temple in Jerusalem.
 - f. 520 B.C. – After a sixteen-year delay, God sent Haggai to motivate the people to rebuild.
 - i. **Haggai 1:3-4** – *“Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, ‘Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?’ ”*
 - ii. The book of Ezra reveals an interesting fact, which is that the people used the paneling (imported from Lebanon) designated for the interior of the Temple as paneling for their homes!
8. Haggai challenged the people to consider their lack of honoring God with their material lack.
 - a. **Haggai 1:5-6** – *“Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Consider your ways! You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes.’ ”*
 - b. Pastor Gary said, “When you deny God the resources he’s given [to] you, you will suddenly find your own resources lacking. It is amazing when we offer the little we have to God how he does much compared to what we think we can do when we hold on to a lot.”
 - c. God also brought a drought upon the land as another way to “get their attention,” all of which was due to their failure to appropriately honor God.
 - i. **Haggai 1:10-11** – *“Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands.”*

9. It's a common practice for pastors to teach from the book of Haggai with the focus being misplaced priorities, and there's certainly an element of that in this book, but Pastor Gary said it's important to ask the question, "Why was the Temple left in ruins for sixteen years?"

10. Pastor Gary said, "For years I would just hammer the principle home [concerning] misplaced priorities... Why did they stop building, was it for purely selfish reasons, [or] did they get lazy and give up, [or was] it as simple as lacking right priorities? ... I think it's easy for us to read the book of Haggai and just get bothered [about] their misplaced priorities and think to ourselves, 'Okay, [I] need to get [my] priorities right.' ... [It's easy to think] that they had put God on hold while they attended to their own busy lives. ... Before we judge them for being lazy and unmotivated with misplaced priorities, let's dig a little deeper here and find out why?"

11. The book of Ezra provides the answers to why they stopped building and why the Temple of God lay in ruins.
 - a. **Ezra 4:1-5** - *"Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, 'Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.' But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel said to them, 'You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us.' Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia."*
(Emphasis added)
 - b. Pastor Gary said, "[Their adversaries] hired attorneys... [for the purpose of getting] a legal injunction to prevent the Jews from building the Temple of God!"
 - c. King Artaxerxes directed the adversaries of the Jews to bring a cease and desist order to stop the building.
 - i. **Ezra 4:23-24** - *"Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease. Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia."*
 1. In the "second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia" God

sent Haggai with a message to rebuild!

12. [Haggai 2:4-5](#) - *“Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,” says the LORD; ‘and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,’ says the LORD, ‘and work; for I am with you,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; **do not fear!**’ ” (Emphasis added)*
13. The Jews stopped building because they were discouraged and fearful, but through the encouragement of Haggai and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the rebuilding began.
 - a. [Haggai 1:14-15](#) - *“So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius.”*
 - b. Pastor Gary said, “You know what’s interesting about the book of Haggai, [which] is different from all of the other prophets? [The] people actually did what the prophet told them to do! You read almost any of the other prophets of the Old Testament and the people [vehemently rejected the prophet and his message]! ... [In this account] the people [were thankful for Haggai’s words of encouragement because they were discouraged and frustrated]. ... They rebuilt the Temple of God in five years. ... [They] finished the Temple in 515 B.C. ... All they needed was a little encouragement.”
14. Pastor Gary said, “Until you know somebody’s story, don’t judge by what you see on the surface. ... [The book of Haggai] also reminds us that there are sometimes reasons why people do what they do, why people behave as they do. It may not necessarily be an excuse for their behavior; it wasn’t an excuse [in Haggai’s day]. ... Even though somebody’s behavior may not be an excuse, it might be a reason for us to [go] a little bit deeper and understand their story. ... [We] may have compassion instead of judgment, and maybe we will have some comfort for them instead of frustration. God sent Haggai to a people who needed to be encouraged.”
15. Pastor Gary said, “Shallow-surfaced people are a dime a dozen in our world. How about as Christ followers we actually go deeper with somebody to love their heart and to value their soul that Jesus died for? It’s important that we get to know [others] beyond the surface, that we accept and love an individual with all of their flaws and all of their scars, because we’ve got some of our own too. Someone has said that Christianity is one beggar showing another beggar where to find bread. Well, let’s help people find the bread of life. Let’s direct people to Jesus, and one of the principle ways that people are going to want Jesus is when we genuinely,

authentically love them enough to ask [them about] their story. They may not want to share their story, or you may not have an opportunity to ask what their story is, but at the very least give them the benefit of the doubt and think the best of them. [Ask] yourself, 'How would Jesus love [this person] and interact with them?' Be [a] Haggai to somebody, [a person who comes alongside someone and says,] 'God's got this. Be strong. Don't be afraid. The Lord is with you!' [Be someone who] has compassion and grace and love for those who need it."

16. **1 Peter 3:8** - *"Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble."* (NIV 1984)

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Haggai 1:1-11; 2:1-5** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Provide an overview of the life of Haggai. (See #1 through #6 above)
3. Read and discuss the Scriptures associated by Haggai's challenge to the Jews. (See #8 above)
4. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's remarks concerning the typical way most pastors teach/preach on the book of Haggai. (See #9 and #10 above)
5. Read and discuss **Ezra 4:1-5, 23-24**. (See #11 above)
6. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about times when they didn't follow the Lord because they were discouraged.
7. Read and discuss **Haggai 2:4-5**. (See #12 above)
8. How have you been influenced by the encouragement of others? (See #13 above)
9. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments regarding the importance of understanding someone's story. (See #14 and #15 above)
10. Read and discuss **1 Peter 3:8**. (See #16 above)
11. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)