**Haggai in the context of Emmanuel WOW! SPRING SEMESTER 2021**

**LEADER’S GUIDE AND ADDED INFO FOR HELP IN GUIDING SMALL GROUP/PARTICIPANT WORK**

**WEEK # 5**

**KEY VERSE: Haggai 1:2**

***This is what the LORD Almighty says: “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD’s house’”.***

Pray as you begin your study at home, in your small group, or with another small group leader

HELPFUL HINT for LEADER: This study is the basic introduction to the post-exilic prophet, Haggai. It’s only two verses, but, like the first two verses of many of Paul’s letters in the New Testament, the writer, his credentials, God’s attitude and the object of the prophecy/letter holds a lot of information to understand the rest of the particular message.

IDEA for an “ice-breaker” to begin the study while some may still be trickling in is to ask the group, “If you got a person letter from God today, what would you want it to say? What would you probably hear?

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**LEADER NOTES FOR OBSERVATION OF THE TEXT:** **(see participants guide for working through passage)**

The “OBSERVATION” of this text is pretty easy---but keep an ear and eye out for when participants don’t stick to “O” and want to hurry to “I” and “A”. Just stick to “what does the text say and how does the text say it”!

**Follow the verse sections throughout the small group study:**

**OBSERVATION** of what the passage says and how the passage says it (details, repetitions, conjunctions…)

**Verses** **1 & 2**

**1.** How does Haggai begin this record of his prophetic role in Judah’s history?

Mark or note the use of precision dating through out Haggai and mark the sequence of dates in your Bible or on the Haggai NIV manuscript. 1:15, 2:1, 10, 18, 20

**LEADER NOTE:** The basic background key to Haggai is as follows: In 538 BC, the Persian King Cyrus conquered Babylon and wrote an Empire-wide message for those who had been exiled from their homelands by the Babylonians that they could return to their cities and reestablish their work, homes and places of worship. The entire book of Haggai takes place in a time span of 4 months (as you and your group will see clearly when you mark the 5 “time stamps”) in 520 BC. No work had been done on the Temple after the foundation was laid in 536 BC.

**2.** To whom is the prophesy of Haggai addressed in these first two verses?

**LEADER NOTE:** Zerubbabel is the 3rd-born grandson of Jehoachin, the last King of Judah from the Davidic line. Only in Ezra is he called a “governor”, indicating the status of a vassal “king” within the Persian Empire. Joshua the High Priest is a Levite and the son of Jehozadek, the last high priest before the destruction of the temple. Ezra underscores this history (see Ezra 5:1-2). Both these men and their fathers were taken into exile under Cyrus’ edict and returned with the nearly 50,000 Jews in the first wave.

**3.** How does Haggai identify God as the one speaking through him? Note this identity’s repetition in 1:5, 7, 2:7, 9, and 11

**LEADER NOTE:** “LORD Almighty” is used more than 90 times by the three post-exilic prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. It’s transliteration in Hebrew is “YHWH of the Heavenly Hosts” or “YHWH of the angle armies” indicating the absolute sovereignty of YHWH, the Lord God in Covenant with His people, their history and the history of the nations.

**4.** What seems to be God’s concern He wants to address through Haggai?

**LEADER NOTE:** Looking ahead to v. 4, you’ll see the repetition of the word “time” concerning what the exiles have been doing since their return about 18 years earlier. Jerusalem is still in ruins, the city walls are not rebuilt, nor anything built since the foundation of the temple was laid. We know from Nehemiah (circa 430 BC) that 90 years after Haggai, Jerusalem was still uninhabitable, the wall was still rubble, and only a few priestly divisions kept the 2nd temple (after Haggai’s efforts) sacrificial system going sporadically.

**INTERPRETATION**—working to understand the passage in its own context, **“there and then”** means Haggai’s focus for his first readers late in 520 BC. Remember that this is about 62 years after the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the Temple in 586 BC.

**Verses 1 & 2**

**5.** Why might the precise dating in Haggai be significant to this record of the prophet’s work?

**LEADER NOTE:** The dates in Haggai comprise about 4 months after nothing was done for nearly 18 years. The dates in Haggai are as follows:

 1:1 August 29th, 520 BC

 1:15 September 21st, 520 BC

 2:1 October 17th, 520 BC

 2:10 & v.18 & v.20 December 18th, 520 BC

**6.** What might be the significance of God’s use of “time” and “these people” as the reconstruction of the temple keeps being delayed?

**LEADER NOTE:** Bottom line? How we use our time matters to God. See Ephesians 5:15-20 for Paul’s sense of how to “make the most of our time”. And it is striking here that God does not refer the post-exilic Jews as “my people”, but as “these people”, a rebuke or a reminder that their lack of attention to YHWH betrays a lack of relationship with the God of the Covenant.

**APPLICATION:** your response as a disciple of Jesus in the **“here and now”** of your life, congregation, community, and world.

**Verses 1 & 2**

 **7.** How might God “fill in the blank” if he wrote you a letter today that began, “\_\_\_your name\_\_\_\_, you say “the time has not yet come to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_fill in blank\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

 What might be a good “first step” beginning responding to God’s prompt above?

**LEADER NOTE:** This may be a good exercise to do in groups of two people. Encourage your participants to be honest about something they can put their finger on that needs attention concerning their faith, relationship to God, spiritual discipline or just a daily habit that needs revising or elimination.

**And a little reminder of the of the exilic and post-exilic prophets of when and to whom the LORD spoke through them.**

