



With the start of the new year, we began a series in Haggai. Haggai, we learnt, spoke God's word in a season of disappointment. The Jews had returned from exile, but life back in the homeland was not all they had hoped, and the temple they had returned to build remained in ruins (see Ezra 1-4). God gave Haggai 4 oracles for this disappointed people. We considered the first this Sunday.

1 – A life in ruins (1v2-11)

Both the temple (v4, 9) and the land (v6, 10-11) were in ruins. The temple was rubble and there was a drought. God's people might be forgiven for thinking now was not the time to rebuild the temple (v2). We, too, may look at our lives, world and church and think that now is not the time to seek to do great things for God.

But it turns out that not *everything* was a ruin, for while they allowed God's house to remain a ruin, they found the time and energy to build themselves "panelled houses" (v4). In a world that loves to mislead us, this challenges our priorities.

2 – A call to wake up (1v2-11)

God urges them to see that there is a link between their poor harvests, lack of temple and nice houses. It is *God* who has inflicted them with this hardship (v9-11). But this is not to be vindictive or punish them, but to give them a wake up call and urge them to see sense and reprioritise as they sit under his discipline.

The writer of Hebrews says that Christians should expect to experience discipline (though never punishment – Jesus has dealt with that). But God's discipline is a good thing as it is a sign and an act of God's love, and it is for our good (12v4-13).

3 – A command to build for God (1v8)

At the centre of God's speech lies the simple command: get building. What's fascinating is *why* God instructs them to do this. It is so that he "may take

pleasure in it and be honoured". This temple project, it turns out, is all about God! It is for *his* blessing and enjoyment. If this sounds self-indulgent to us, we must remember that God is neither a creature nor a sinner. He *really* is worthy.

We, too, are to fix our eyes on God and his priorities, and seek his glory. But what are we to build, for Jesus is our temple? Paul employs building imagery in Ephesians, but he describes us as the bricks *being built* by God (2v19-22). There is a small building task for us: we are to build each other up as we love each other and use our gifts to serve (4v16, 29).

4 – A response of faith (1v12-15a)

Wonderfully, the wake up call worked! The people and their leaders listened and got building (v14). Preciously, God speaks to them again, saying "I am with you" (v13) as they face a daunting task. The God who has been "the Lord Almighty" – powerful military commander – throughout this passage (v2, 5, 7, 9) is now "the Lord *their* God" (v12, 14). And by his Spirit he is with us too (Matthew 28v20)!

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group...

1. What was the Jewish people's situation in the time of Haggai? (You may want to skim through the first 4 chapters of Ezra to remind yourself.)
→ How does that set the context for what God has to say to them in this book?
2. Do you resonate with the feeling of life/the church/the world being in ruins?
3. What do you make of the people's excuse in v2?
4. How and why have the people here experienced God's discipline?
→ How is God's discipline different to his punishment? (You may want to look up Hebrews 12v4-13).
→ Why can we take heart (Hebrews 12v5) if we experience God's discipline?
→ What experiences have you had of God's discipline? How did God bless you?
5. How does the command of v8 reveal us to be in a very different (and much better!) place in salvation history to this people?
→ What does this command mean for us with no physical temple to build?
6. What encouragements can we take from how God and the people interact in v12-15a?