THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

The King with the Signet Ring

Haggai, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King with the Signet Ring: The Book of Haggai, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Be honest. Is there something you know you should do, but you keep putting it off? Homework, a hard conversation, cleaning your room, reading your Bible, apologizing to someone. You tell yourself, I'll get to it later. The time isn't right yet.

That's exactly what was happening in Jerusalem about 520 years before Jesus. God's people had come home from exile in Babylon with a mission: rebuild God's temple. They started strong. Then they got discouraged, distracted, and busy with their own lives. For sixteen years, the temple sat unfinished while they built nice houses for themselves.

Then a prophet named Haggai showed up with a simple message: Consider your ways. And here's the amazing part. Unlike almost every other prophet in the Bible, people actually listened. Within twenty-three days, they were back at work. Haggai is short, practical, and surprisingly relevant for anyone who has ever procrastinated, felt like their best wasn't good enough, or wondered whether God was really with them.

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Haggai in three chapters: paneled houses and pockets with holes (Haggai 1), when your best looks too small (Haggai 2:1-9), and clean hands and the signet ring (Haggai 2:10-23).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains what happened after the exile, why the temple rebuilding stalled, and how Haggai's dated sermons fit together. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with someone you trust; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as how some of Haggai's promises are fulfilled, I'll try to be fair and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Haggai in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the thirty-seventh book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Haggai is the first of the three prophets who spoke after the exile. In 520 BC, the second year of King Darius of Persia, he delivered four precisely dated messages within less than four months, urging the returned exiles to finish rebuilding the temple. This book connects Haggai with the history in Ezra 4-6, and highlights that the people responded and resumed work within twenty-three days.

It covers procrastination and priorities (Haggai 1), discouragement when our best seems small (Haggai 2:1-9), and the lesson that holiness is not contagious but defilement is, along with God's promise to Zerubbabel, the signet ring (Haggai 2:10-23). It explains how that promise reverses the curse on King Jehoiachin in Jeremiah 22:24 and keeps David's royal line alive, and it presents fairly the different ways Christians understand Jesus' genealogies.

Real Talk boxes address procrastination, money and contentment, discouragement and comparison, courage, holiness, and God's presence. One box gently encourages teens who are struggling with discouragement to talk with a trusted adult and lists 988 and 911.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows Jesus walking into the rebuilt temple, Jesus as the true temple (John 2:19-21), Jesus touching the unclean and making them clean, and Zerubbabel in Jesus' family tree (Matthew 1:12, Luke 3:27). Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

My prayer is that every reader will put God first, be strong and do the work in front of them, and know that He is with them.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

Home from Exile

In 586 BC, Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and Solomon's temple and carried many of Judah's people into exile. Then, in 539 BC, Persia conquered Babylon. The next year, King Cyrus of Persia issued a decree allowing the Jews to return home and rebuild the temple. About fifty thousand people made the long journey back, led by Zerubbabel, a descendant of King David, and Joshua, the high priest.

A Strong Start

At first, everything went well. The people rebuilt the altar and started offering sacrifices again. Around 536 BC, they laid the foundation of the new temple. There was a huge celebration. The priests blew trumpets, the Levites played cymbals, and the people sang, "For he is good, for his loving kindness endures forever toward Israel." But not everyone was cheering. The old men who had seen Solomon's temple wept loudly, because the new foundation looked so small.

The Project Stalls

Then the trouble began. Neighboring peoples opposed the rebuilding, discouraging the builders, hiring officials to work against them, and writing letters to the Persian king. Ezra 4 describes how the project ground to a halt. "Then work stopped on God's house which is at Jerusalem. It stopped until the second year

of the reign of Darius king of Persia." For about sixteen years, the temple sat unfinished. The people got used to it. They focused on their own homes, farms, and lives.

Enter Haggai

In 520 BC, the second year of King Darius, God sent two prophets: Haggai and Zechariah. We know almost nothing about Haggai personally. His name probably comes from the Hebrew word for festival, so he may have been born on a feast day. Some think he was an old man who had seen Solomon's temple as a child. Ezra says that through the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, the people started building again. They finished the temple in 515 BC.

Four Dated Messages

Haggai is one of the most precisely dated books in the Bible. It contains four messages, each with an exact date. Using ancient calendars, scholars can match them to our calendar. The first came on the first day of the sixth month, around late August 520 BC. The second came about seven weeks later, during the Feast of Tabernacles. The third and fourth came on the same day in the ninth month, around mid-December. All four messages were given in less than four months. And the people started working just twenty-three days after the first one.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Haggai 1): Paneled houses and pockets with holes.

Chapter 2 (Haggai 2:1-9): When your best looks too small.

Chapter 3 (Haggai 2:10-23): Clean hands and the signet ring.

Contents

Setting the Scene .....

1 Paneled Houses and Pockets with Holes *1* .....

2 When Your Best Looks Too Small *2:1–9* .....

3 Clean Hands and the Signet Ring *2:10–23* .....

Where This Points .....

CHAPTER 1

Paneled Houses and Pockets with Holes

Haggai 1

Haggai's book opens like a news report, with a date. "In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, the LORD's word came by Haggai the prophet, to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest."

That date was probably August 29, 520 BC. The first day of the month was a new moon festival, when people gathered for worship. Haggai picked the perfect moment to speak.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Zerubbabel and Joshua**
>
> Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah, appointed by the Persian king. He was also a grandson of King Jehoiachin, one of the last kings of Judah, which made him a descendant of King David. Joshua was the high priest, a descendant of the priests who had served in Solomon's temple. Together, they represented the two most important offices in Israel: the royal line of David and the priesthood. In Ezra, Joshua's name appears in its later form, Jeshua. Haggai spoke directly to both leaders, and to all the people.

Haggai began by quoting what the people were saying. "These people say, The time hasn't yet come, the time for the LORD's house to be built."

That's procrastination in a sentence. The people weren't saying they would never build the temple. They were just saying, Not yet. Maybe the economy was bad. Maybe there was opposition. Maybe they were waiting for a better moment. Whatever the reason, sixteen years had gone by.

> **REAL TALK** **Not Yet**
>
> Procrastination is one of the most common struggles for students. We put off homework, studying, chores, applications, and hard conversations. Sometimes we put off God too. I'll start reading my Bible when life calms down. I'll get serious about my faith in college. I'll apologize when the time is right. But not yet often turns into never. Proverbs says, "How long will you sleep, sluggard? When will you arise out of your sleep?" What have you been putting off? The best time to start is usually now.

Then God asked a pointed question. "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies waste?"

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Paneled Houses**
>
> Paneled houses were homes with wooden paneling on the walls or ceilings. In the ancient Middle East, wood was expensive, especially fine cedar. Paneling was a luxury, the kind of thing you'd find in palaces and temples. Solomon had paneled the first temple with cedar. Now the people were paneling their own homes while God's house lay in ruins. They had time and money for their own comfort, but not for God's work.

The people's problem wasn't that they didn't have time or money. It was that they had the wrong priorities.

Then came the key phrase of the book. "Now therefore this is what the LORD of Armies says: Consider your ways."

In other words, Stop and think. Look at your life. What's really going on?

God pointed out that nothing seemed to be working for them. "You have sown much, and bring in little. You eat, but you don't have enough. You drink, but you aren't filled with drink. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages earns wages to put them into a bag with holes in it."

REAL TALK **Pockets with Holes**

Have you ever felt like no matter how much you have, it's never enough? You get the new phone, the new shoes, or the new game, and a few weeks later, you want something else. You earn money from a job, and it disappears before you know where it went. Haggai describes that feeling perfectly: putting wages into a bag with holes. When we live for ourselves, nothing ever truly satisfies. Jesus said, "seek first God's Kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well." When God is first, everything else falls into its proper place.

REAL TALK **Money and Priorities**

Haggai's message isn't that having a nice house is wrong. It's about priorities. Where does your money go? Where does your time go? It's worth looking at honestly. If you have a job or an allowance, think about setting aside part of it to give to your church or to help people in need. Giving isn't about earning God's favor. It's about saying, God, You come first. Many Christians find that when they start giving, they actually feel freer, not poorer.

God said it again. "Consider your ways." Then He gave the solution. "Go up to the mountain, bring wood, and build the house. I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified."

Simple. Stop waiting. Start building.

Then God explained why things had been going so badly. "Because of my house that lies waste, while each of you is busy with his own

house." That's why the rain hadn't come and the crops had failed. God had sent a drought to get their attention.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Blessings and Curses**
>
> In the law of Moses, God promised that if Israel obeyed Him, He would bless their land with rain and good harvests. If they turned away, they would experience drought and crop failure. These weren't random punishments. They were warning lights on the dashboard, meant to get the people's attention so they would turn back to God. Not every hard time in life is a punishment, and Jesus warned against assuming that. But in Haggai's day, God made it clear that the drought was connected to their neglect of His house.

Then something remarkable happened. The people listened.

"Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the LORD their God's voice, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him; and the people feared the LORD."

That almost never happens in the Bible. Most prophets were ignored, mocked, or persecuted. Jeremiah was thrown into a pit. Amos was told to go home. But Haggai's audience actually obeyed.

> **REAL TALK** **Actually Listening**
>
> It's one thing to hear a message. It's another to act on it. Haggai's audience didn't just nod along. They changed what they were doing. James wrote, "be doers of the word, and not only hearers." Maybe you've heard a great sermon, read a challenging verse, or gotten good advice from a parent or friend. What did you do with it? The people in Haggai's day show that it's possible to hear God's voice and respond right away.

And then God gave them the best news possible. "I am with you," says the LORD.

That's it. Four words. No long speech. Just a promise. When the people turned back to God, the first thing He told them was that He was with them.

Then "the LORD stirred up the spirit" of Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all the people. And they came and worked on the house of the LORD. When did they start? "In the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king." Just twenty-three days after Haggai's first sermon.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Why Twenty-Three Days?**

Why did it take twenty-three days for the people to start working, instead of the next day? The answer is probably practical. They needed to clear rubble from the site, gather tools, cut timber in the mountains, organize workers, and finish harvesting their crops, since the sixth month was harvest season for figs and grapes. Twenty-three days to get a major construction project started is actually very fast. They didn't just feel inspired. They got organized and got to work.

KEY VERSE

Now therefore this is what the LORD of Armies says:
Consider your ways.

Haggai 1:5 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What excuse did the people use for not building the temple?
2. What does it mean to put your wages into a bag with holes?
3. What have you been putting off that you know God wants you to do?
4. Why do you think the first thing God said after they obeyed was I am with you?

TRY THIS *Consider your ways this week. Write down how you spend your time and money for three days. Then ask: What does this say about my priorities? Make one change to put God first.*

CHAPTER 2

When Your Best Looks Too Small

Haggai 2:1–9

Haggai's second message came "In the seventh month, in the twenty-first day of the month." That was the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, a week-long celebration of the harvest and of God's care for Israel in the wilderness. It was probably around October 17, 520 BC.

The people had been working for about a month. And they were getting discouraged.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Feast of Tabernacles**
>
> The Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Booths or Sukkot, was one of Israel's three great annual festivals. For a week, people lived in temporary shelters made of branches, remembering how God cared for their ancestors in the wilderness. It was a joyful harvest festival. It was also the festival when Solomon had dedicated the first temple centuries earlier. So as the people celebrated, they would have been remembering Solomon's glorious temple. And their own building project looked pitiful in comparison. To make things worse, the harvest that year had been poor.

God knew exactly how they felt. He told Haggai to ask, "Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Isn't it in your eyes as nothing?"

Some of the older people had seen Solomon's temple before Babylon destroyed it, sixty-six years earlier. They remembered its gold, its cedar, its massive stones, and its beauty. Compared to that, the new temple looked like nothing.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Solomon's Temple**

Solomon's temple was one of the most magnificent buildings in the ancient world. It took seven years to build. It was decorated with cedar from Lebanon, carved cherubim, and huge amounts of gold. Even the floor was overlaid with gold. Thousands of workers helped build it. The new temple had none of that. The returned exiles were a small, poor community under Persian rule. Their temple was built with limited resources and probably looked plain. And it didn't have the ark of the covenant, which had been lost when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem.

REAL TALK **Comparison**

Comparison can steal your joy fast. You compare your body, your grades, your family, your house, your clothes, or your talents with someone else's, and suddenly what you have looks like nothing. Social media makes it even worse, because you're comparing your real life with everyone else's highlight reel. The older people in Haggai's day compared the new temple with the old one, and it made everyone discouraged. God's answer wasn't to pretend the new temple was more impressive. It was to remind them that He was with them, and that was what mattered most.

Then God gave them one of the most encouraging messages in the Bible. "Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel, says the LORD. Be strong, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, says the LORD, and work, for I am with you, says the LORD of Armies."

Three times, God said, Be strong. Then He said, Work. And then He gave the reason: I am with you.

REAL TALK **Be Strong and Work**

Notice that God didn't say, Feel strong. He said, Be strong. Strength in the Bible isn't a feeling. It's a choice to keep going, trusting God. And notice that He said, Work. God's presence doesn't mean we sit around and wait. It gives us the courage to do the work in front of us, even when it looks small. Whatever you're facing right now, like schoolwork, a job, a hard situation at home, or serving at church, God says the same thing to you: Be strong. Do the work. I am with you.

Then God reminded them of His promise from long ago. "This is the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, and my Spirit lived among you. Don't be afraid."

Then God made a huge promise. "For this is what the LORD of Armies says: Yet once more, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations. The treasure of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Treasure of All Nations**

The phrase the treasure of all nations has been translated in different ways. Some older translations say the desire of all nations, and many Christians have understood it as a reference to the Messiah, the one all nations long for. Others translate it as the treasures or wealth of all nations, meaning that nations would bring their riches to God's house. Both views point to the same idea: God would fill His house with glory greater than anyone expected. The book of Hebrews quotes Haggai's promise to shake the heavens and earth and connects it to God's unshakable kingdom.

The people were worried that they didn't have enough gold and silver to make the temple beautiful. So God said, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of Armies."

REAL TALK **It's All His**

"The earth is the LORD's, with its fullness." Everything belongs to God, including all the money in the world. That changes how we think about what we have. If everything belongs to God, then we're not really owners. We're managers. That can take pressure off you if you feel like you don't have enough. God isn't limited by your bank account. And it can challenge you if you have a lot, because God might want you to share it. Either way, you can trust Him to provide what you need for what He's called you to do.

Then came the climax. "The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former, says the LORD of Armies; and in this place I will give peace, says the LORD of Armies."

How could a plain, small temple ever have more glory than Solomon's? It didn't seem possible. But God had something in mind that no one could imagine yet.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Herod's Temple**

About five hundred years after Haggai, King Herod the Great began a massive expansion of the temple. He enlarged the temple platform, rebuilt the structure, and covered it with white stone and gold. It took decades. In John 2, people told Jesus that the work had been going on for forty-six years. Some people think that's how Haggai's prophecy was fulfilled. But most Christians believe the greater glory came from something far more important than gold. It came when Jesus walked into that temple.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Safety: When You Feel Like Giving Up**

The people in Haggai's day were so discouraged they were ready to quit. Maybe you know that feeling. Maybe you feel like your best is never good enough, or that nothing you do matters. God's message to you is the same: Be strong. I am with you. Don't be afraid. And He has also given you people to help. If you're feeling really discouraged or hopeless, please talk to a trusted adult, like a parent, school counselor, teacher, or pastor. If you're having

> thoughts of hurting yourself, call or text 988 any time. If you're in immediate danger, call 911.

KEY VERSE

Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,' says the LORD. 'Be strong, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' says the LORD, 'and work, for I am with you,' says the LORD of Armies.

Haggai 2:4 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why were the people discouraged in Haggai 2?
2. When do you compare yourself to others? How does it make you feel?
3. What does it mean to be strong and work because God is with you?
4. How do you think the latter glory of the temple was greater than the former?

TRY THIS *Write down one thing you're working on that feels small or discouraging. Next to it, write Haggai 2:4. Each day this week, take one step on it, and remind yourself that God is with you.*

CHAPTER 3

Clean Hands and the Signet Ring

Haggai 2:10–23

Haggai's third and fourth messages both came on the same day. "In the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius." That was probably December 18, 520 BC, three months after the building started.

For the third message, God told Haggai to ask the priests a question about the law. Think of it as a pop quiz.

First question: If someone carries holy meat, from a sacrifice, in the fold of his garment, and the garment touches bread, stew, wine, oil, or other food, does that food become holy? The priests answered, "No."

Second question: "If one who is unclean by reason of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean?" The priests answered, "It will be unclean."

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Clean and Unclean**
>
> In the law of Moses, things could be holy, meaning set apart for God, or common. And people or things could be clean or unclean. Being unclean wasn't always about sin. Touching a dead body, having certain skin diseases, or other situations made a person ceremonially unclean for a time, so they couldn't take part in temple worship until they went through purification. Haggai's questions point to a key principle in the law: holiness doesn't spread by touch, but uncleanness does.

Then Haggai made his point. "So is this people, and so is this nation before me, says the LORD; and so is every work of their hands. That which they offer there is unclean."

In other words, the people couldn't make themselves holy just by working on a holy building. Being near holy things didn't make them holy. But their sin and disobedience did spread, affecting everything they did.

> **REAL TALK** **Holiness Isn't Contagious**
>
> You can't become holy just by being around holy things. Going to church, wearing a cross necklace, having Christian friends, or listening to worship music are all good. But they don't automatically make you right with God. On the other hand, bad influences spread easily. A bad attitude, a habit of gossip, or a toxic friendship can affect everything in your life. Paul wrote, "Evil companionships corrupt good morals." That's why it matters who you spend time with and what you let into your life. Real holiness comes from God, not from being near religious things.

Then God reminded them of how things had been before they started building. They would come to a heap of grain expecting twenty measures and find only ten. They would go to the wine vat expecting fifty measures and find only twenty. God had struck their crops with blight, mildew, and hail. "Yet you didn't turn to me."

But now things were different. They had laid the foundation of the temple. They had turned back to God. "Is the seed yet in the barn? Yes, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree haven't produced. From today I will bless you."

> **REAL TALK** **From Today**
>
> It was the middle of winter. The seed was still in the barn, not yet planted. The trees hadn't produced fruit yet. Nothing looked different. But God said, From today I will bless you. The people had to trust God's promise before they saw

the results. That's what faith looks like. Maybe you've recently made a decision to follow God more closely, and nothing seems different yet. Keep going. God's blessing often starts before we can see it.

Then came Haggai's fourth and final message, delivered on the same day. This one was just for Zerubbabel.

"I will shake the heavens and the earth. I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations." All the world's powers would be overthrown. Chariots and horses would be thrown down.

Then God made a promise to Zerubbabel. "In that day, says the LORD of Armies, I will take you, Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, says the LORD, and will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, says the LORD of Armies."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Signet Ring**

A signet ring was a ring with a personal seal engraved on it. Kings and officials pressed it into clay or wax to sign official documents. It was like a signature, a password, and an ID card all in one. Whoever had the king's signet ring had the king's authority. It was so valuable that the owner kept it on his hand at all times. For God to call Zerubbabel His signet ring meant that God had chosen him, valued him, and would act through him.

This promise was huge, because of something that had happened about eighty years earlier.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Reversing a Curse**

Zerubbabel's grandfather was King Jehoiachin, also called Coniah or Jechoniah. He was one of the last kings of Judah before the exile. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God had pronounced a severe judgment on him. "As I live," says the LORD, "though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet on my right hand, I would still pluck you from there." Jeremiah also said that none of his descendants would prosper sitting on David's throne. It

looked like David's royal line had been cut off. But in Haggai 2:23, God used the exact same image. He took Zerubbabel, Jehoiachin's grandson, and said, I will make you like a signet ring. God reversed the curse and showed that David's family line was still part of His plan.

Zerubbabel never became a king. Judah was still under Persian rule. So how was the promise fulfilled? Many Christians believe it pointed beyond Zerubbabel to one of his descendants: Jesus, the Son of David, who would be the true King.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Zerubbabel in Jesus' Family Tree**

Zerubbabel appears in both genealogies of Jesus in the New Testament. Matthew says, "After the exile to Babylon, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel. Shealtiel became the father of Zerubbabel." Luke also lists "the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel." Matthew and Luke trace Jesus' family through different sons of David, and Christians have explained the differences in several ways. Many believe Matthew traces Joseph's legal royal line, while Luke may trace Mary's family or Joseph's biological line. Either way, both include Zerubbabel. God's signet ring was part of the family that led to Jesus.

REAL TALK **Chosen**

God told Zerubbabel, I have chosen you. Zerubbabel came from a family with a broken history. His grandfather had been judged by God. But God still chose him. Maybe you come from a family with a messy past. Maybe you've made mistakes yourself. God's choice isn't based on your family history or your performance. If you belong to Jesus, God has chosen you too. Paul wrote that God chose His people in Christ before the foundation of the world. You are valuable to Him, like a signet ring on His hand.

The book of Haggai ends there. Four short messages, less than four months, and a whole community changed. And about five years later, in 515 BC, the temple was finished.

KEY VERSE

In that day, says the LORD of Armies, I will take you, Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel,' says the LORD, 'and will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you,' says the LORD of Armies."

Haggai 2:23 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What did Haggai's questions to the priests teach about holiness and uncleanness?
2. Why do you think God said From today I will bless you before the people saw any results?
3. Why was it so significant that God called Zerubbabel His signet ring?
4. How does it feel to know that God chooses people from broken families and messy pasts?

TRY THIS *Think about the influences in your life, like friends, media, and habits. Choose one that's pulling you away from God and make a change this week. Then choose one good influence to spend more time with.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Haggai promised that "The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former." Jewish readers have long treasured this promise of God's glory returning to His house. Christians believe it came true in a surprising way: in Jesus.

The temple that Zerubbabel built was later expanded by King Herod, but it was the same temple, the second temple. And into that temple walked Jesus. As a baby, He was presented there, and old Simeon called Him "a light for revelation to the nations, and the glory of your people Israel." As an adult, He taught there and healed there. The glory of God Himself was walking through its courts. That's why its latter glory was greater than Solomon's. But Jesus went further. He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." John explains, "But he spoke of the temple of his body." Jesus is the true temple, the place where God meets us. Haggai taught that holiness isn't contagious, but uncleanness is. When an unclean person touched something, it became unclean. But Jesus reversed that. When He touched a man with leprosy, the leprosy didn't spread to Jesus. Instead, Jesus said, "I want to. Be made clean." His holiness spread to the man. And Zerubbabel, God's signet ring, appears in Jesus' family tree. "Shealtiel became the father of Zerubbabel." God kept His promise to David alive, all the way to Jesus, the King whose kingdom will never be shaken.

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He promises to be with you.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Haggai shows that uncleanness spreads and we cannot make ourselves holy. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus makes the unclean clean.

Jesus, the true temple, touched the unclean and made them clean. He died for our sins and rose again.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Put Him first.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? Haggai says, Consider your ways. You can put God first today. You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've gone my own way. I've put my own plans first and put You off until later. I can't make myself clean. Thank You that Jesus, the true temple, touches the unclean and makes them clean, that He died for my sins and rose again. Forgive me, and make me Yours. Help me put You first, be strong, and do the work You give me, knowing You are with me. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read all of Haggai, then Ezra 5-6 and John 2:13-22.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Stop putting it off. Name one thing God has been asking you to do, and take the first step this week.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Haggai asked his listeners to consider their ways, and that takes time. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Haggai is right, God is with His people, and He is still building something glorious.

'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the LORD of Armies; 'and in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of Armies.

Haggai 2:9 (WEB)