

BIBLE STUDY: Running with God

by Ebencilin Mohan

A Bible study based on Haggai's prophecy encouraging us to run with God's timing to fulfill His purpose for our lives.

Introduction

People around the world, from economists to the common person, worry about the challenges targeting today's global economy. Dipping house markets, fluctuating job markets, family breakdowns and increasing violence have become part of everyday news. There is a larger decline in morality and every church is faced with challenges like never before.

As Christians living in these troubled times, we feel the pressure. Satan, with his 2000 plus years of expertise, distracts us with every possible trouble and makes us lose focus on our walk with God. In spite of understanding the ABCs of becoming a Christian, the Ten Commandments and all key promises from the Bible, we struggle to keep our spiritual life consistent. We're not so different from the people of Judah during Haggai's time.

This four-part Bible study takes a look at how God transformed the people of Judah to become a fruitful nation. God sent a message to the people of Judah and its leaders to follow God's timing and rebuild the temple. As they obeyed His command God encouraged them with His promise to send His spirit among them. Their troubles were turned to real blessings from God. God insisted they live a clean and holy life because they were chosen by the Almighty. He expects the same to be our daily goal.

I pray that this study will enable you to rebuild your temple, obey God's voice, trust His promise and work towards the purpose that God has called you as His chosen vessel so that you will experience the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in your life during troubled times. May the Lord be glorified as you walk from glory to glory in your renewed spiritual life.

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Part One: To Rebuild Our Temple

History of the Book of Haggai

The author of this book is Haggai himself, and it is related to the rebuilding of the second temple of Jerusalem. The first temple was constructed during the reign of David's son, Solomon, and completed in 957 B.C. The temple suffered at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylonia, who removed the temple treasures in 604 B.C. and 597 B.C. and totally destroyed the building in 587/586 B.C. Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews were deported to Babylonia in 582 B.C.

After 70 years of captivity, under an edict of King Cyrus of Persia, a remnant of 40,000 Jews returned to the land. Led by Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and Joshua, the high priest, they began the rebuilding of the city. The foundation of the temple was laid right away but the work was delayed for 15 years due to hostile neighbors. King Darius ascended the Persian throne in 521 B.C. and was favorable to the Jews. God spoke through the prophet Haggai, and the work on the Temple resumed in 520 B.C. History says that it was finished in 516 or 515 B.C. and later renovated and expanded by King Herod.

Introduction

In Haggai, we read about God commanding the people of Judah to rebuild God's temple instead of lethargically living in paneled houses. God challenges them to consider their ways and keep their priorities in order so that their fruitlessness and discontentment in their life could be changed to a blessed life.

This Bible passage teaches us to rebuild our temple—the parts of our lives that are ruined with our sinful nature without the power of the Holy Spirit. God is more than enough to stir up our spirit and make us fruitful for the glory of His name when we submit our heart, soul and mind to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Read Haggai 1: 1-15.

1. Who received God's message through the prophet Haggai?
Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, the governor of Judah, and Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, who in turn passed it on to the people of Judah.
2. Refer to Haggai 1:2 and notice how God refers to the people of Israel. Has it changed from the days when God brought them out of Egypt?
God refers to the people of Israel as "this people" or "these people" since He is not happy with them. God used to call them "my people" during the days of Exodus. (See Leviticus 26:12 and Jeremiah 7:23a)
3. Are we (people living in New Testament times) His people?
Yes. (See Romans 9:25-26 and Romans 8:14-17)
4. Did the Israelites follow other gods or not follow God during the time of Haggai?
No. They followed the one true God.
5. Why then was God not happy with the people of Judah?
The people of Judah were lethargic about their primary duty—to reestablish the worship of God at His temple. They lived in paneled houses in luxury while God's temple was still in the ruins. (Haggai 1:2-4)
6. What is the temple of God today?
We are God's temple. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)
7. What are some of the ways in which "our spiritual temples" are ruined?
Inactive prayer life, procrastinating on opportunities for witnessing, not submitting our lives consistently to the "Lordship" of Christ, yielding to the flesh (Galatians 5:16-21, 24-25)
8. According to Haggai 1:5, 6, 10 and 11, what are some of the after-effects of a lethargic lifestyle which they did not realize?
Fruitlessness, discontentment, wasted hard work and frustration
 - vs. 6 - "You have sown much, and harvested little." - Less fruit
 - vs. 6 - "You eat, but you never have enough." - Less Satisfaction

- vs. 6 - “You drink, but you never have your fill.” - *Less fulfillment*
 - vs. 6 - “You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm.” - *Less Comfort*
 - vs. 10-11 - “He who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.” – *Less return on effort*
 - “Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors.”- *Drought.*
9. Is it possible to please or glorify God with our lives? Is it a commandment?
Yes. It is possible and we are supposed to glorify God since we were bought with Jesus’ blood. He paid for all our sins. (See Haggai 1:8b and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20)
10. Did the people of Israel listen to the voice of God?
Yes, they listened and obeyed. (Haggai 1:12)
11. How did God enable them when the Israelites decided to obey and run with God?
God stirred up the spirit of the governor, high priest and the people and they began the work on the temple. (Haggai 1:14)
12. Can we do anything without God’s help?
No. Everything we do is because of God working in us. (see John 15:5, 7-8)
13. How can we run with God to rebuild His temple (our lives)?
- *Accepting Christ as our Savior and Lord of our life. (Romans 5:6-11)*
 - *Working out our Salvation with fear and trembling. (Philippians 2:12-13)*
 - *Doing good works that God has planned for us. (Ephesians 2:10)*

Memory Verse

What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (2 Corinthians 6:16)

Prayer

Dear God, Help us to remember that you paid the price for our sins through our precious blood and allow us with the help of the Holy Spirit to rebuild the weak parts of our life. Be the Lord of our life and help us to help us to work out our Salvation and do the good works that you have prepared for us. Make us more fruitful for the glory of your Holy name. In Jesus’s name we pray. Amen!

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Part Two: To Receive Strength and Purpose

Introduction

In this passage, God encourages the Israelites with His promise. He assures them that the glory of the house they were building would in spiritual respects exceed the glory of the first temple built by King Solomon. God indirectly foretells the coming of Jesus Christ in the temple, which is far better than anything.

As Christians, God is always with us in our daily Christian walk. He encourages us with His promises when our souls are discouraged. As we yield our lives to God, the Holy Spirit leads us, and most of the time even weaker vessels are used for His glory. It is comforting to know that He accepts us as we are with His unconditional love. With the salvation that Jesus purchased for us with His precious blood, we enjoy peace with God the Father and we will get to see Him face to face and thank Him when we get to heaven.

Read Haggai 2:1-9.

1. Did God see the discouraged heart of the Israelites? Do you believe that He sees the condition of our individual hearts today?
*Yes. (Haggai 2:3)
Yes, He sees the condition of every person's heart. (1 Samuel 16:7b)*
2. What was God's promise to the discouraged Israelites?
He promises to be with them and that the covenant He made with them when they came out of Egypt still stands. (Haggai 2:4-5)
3. What did God command the Israelites to do after encouraging them?
To work. (Haggai 2:4b) God expects us to do our part so that He can bless the work of our hands. God graciously allows us to participate in furthering His Kingdom on earth. What a privilege!
4. Did the presence of God's spirit strengthen the lives of the Israelites? Do you believe that God can do the same today in our lives? Have you had any experience in your life where the Holy Spirit strengthened you in a challenging time? How can an invisible God make this happen in our lives?
Yes. When we allow God to speak to our heart and allow Holy Spirit to lead our life, we can definitely stay strong. (Haggai 2:5b and John 14:16)
5. What was God's plan and promise for the new temple?
To fill it with His glory (Haggai 2:7b), that the coming glory of the temple would be greater than in the past and that in the temple (Haggai 2:9), He will give peace (Haggai 2:9)
6. How did God fill the old and new temple with His glory?
In the old temple, the glory of the Lord literally filled the temple. In the new temple, baby Jesus was brought in for dedication, and Simeon and Anna prophesied that He would bring Salvation to Gentiles and Israel. (See 1 Kings 8:10-11, Luke 2:21-22, and Luke 2:30-32)
7. How can the presence of the Holy Spirit change our lives? What are the possible problems that anyone can get into in the absence of Holy Spirit?
The Spirit of God can lead and guide us into all truth, convict us of our sins and help us to live a godly life. Our latter life will be better than the former one. The problems are that an empty house without the Holy Spirit can lead Satan to have his stronghold in the individual and the last condition may become worse than the first. (John 16:13a, John 16:7-8, Haggai 2:9a, and Luke 11:24-26)
8. Did God provide peace in His temple as promised?
*Yes. Simeon says that in his praise while receiving baby Jesus.
Also right after Jesus died, the veil that divided the Holy place from the Most Holy place tore into two parts. This signifies that a new way opened for all believers into the very presence of God. Jesus made peace with God on behalf of the fallen world. (Luke 2:29, Matthew 27:50-51, and Ephesians 2:13-21)*
9. How is this peace from God different from the peace that the world leaders/world promise or strive for?
See John 14:27

10. “All religions lead to heaven. If I live a ‘good’ life I can get to heaven.” Do you believe that the statements are true?
There is no other name on earth except Jesus Christ that can lead us to Heaven because Jesus is the only divine son of God, who lead a fully pure human life and paid the wages of our sin through His death on the Cross. Jesus reconciled us with God which no other way or religion has done in all history.

Discussion Questions (Optional)

1. What are some of the reasons for discouragement in our day to day life?
2. Have you ever felt discouraged in your walk with God?
3. As a Christian, do you think it is okay to feel discouraged?
4. “Don’t be afraid. You will be alright” – Have you heard this from anybody during a challenging situation? Do you think the impact from the message will be different from what you might experience while reading the same from the bible?

Memory Verse

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm. (Psalm 20:7-8)

Prayer

Dear God, we thank you for guiding us in all truth, convicting us of our sins through the power of Your Holy Spirit. We thank You for sending Your son Jesus Christ to be the ultimate sacrifice so that we can be redeemed and have access to Your throne of grace.

Help us to surrender our lives to Your will so that we may receive eternal life and become heavenly citizens when You call us home. In Jesus’s name we pray, Amen!

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Part Three: Towards a Holy Life

Introduction

In this passage God tells His people that because of their sin in delaying to build the temple, He had blocked their prosperous progress in all their efforts. He would revert the curse/fruitlessness into divine blessing after their obedience.

We are by nature sinful and unclean. Since we are cleansed by the blood of Christ, God calls us to set our minds on heavenly things and to put all our earthly desires that can separate us from God. Jesus became cursed on the cross, died and relieved us from the death penalty that we were charged with. When we put our trust in Him and believe in His name for our forgiveness, He blesses our life and helps us to strive for more holiness.

Read Haggai 2:10-19.

1. What was God's command to the Israelites regarding uncleanness?
Read Numbers 19:11, 13.
2. Why was God not happy with uncleanness? Does spiritual uncleanness a problem in our lives today?
Read Haggai 2:14.
3. What are some of the things that can make us unclean? How are we called to live?
If we associate ourselves with any dead activity then our lives can become defiled. We are called to 1) Set our hearts on things above, 2) Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature and 3) Put on godly characters. (Haggai 2:13, Colossians 3:1-15)
4. Should blessings from God always bring in wealth and prosperity?
Not necessarily. (Read Isaiah 45:7 and Job 1:21b)
5. Can God turn curse to blessing?
Yes. (See Deuteronomy 23:5 and Galatians 3:10-14)
6. Why would God Curse mankind?
When a person makes human flesh his strength, he can be cursed. (See Jeremiah 17:5 and Galatians 1:9)
7. Who will be blessed?
Those who trust in the Lord. (Jeremiah 17: 7-8)
8. When will all curses from this world end?
When Jesus returns and the new heaven and new earth come. (Revelation 22:1-5)
9. What are some of the common challenges towards living a godly life?

Memory Verse

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Prayer

Dear God, we thank and praise you for making us a way through the blood of the lamb to receive eternal life which is the greatest blessing of all. We are not worthy of all your mercy and we thank you for your love even though we don't deserve it. Thank you for cleansing us. Enable us to focus on heavenly things and fight against the flesh so that we may lead a life that is holy and pleasing to you. We give you all the glory. In Jesus's name we pray, Amen!

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Part Four: To Be Like His Signet Ring

Introduction

In this passage, God assures Zerubbabel that, as a reward for his pious zeal and activity he was chosen to be like God's Signet ring. After eleven generations he was given the privilege to have Jesus Christ in his lineage.

Our Christian life in Christ is full of hope and expectation for the second coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ since we are just aliens on this earth. God has adopted us as sons and daughters in Christ Jesus and sealed us with the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption. Let us run with the help of God a race that is worthy of receiving the prize.

Read Haggai 2:20-23.

1. What was God's promise to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah?
 - to shake the heavens and the earth
 - to overthrow the throne of kingdoms
 - to make you like My signet ring, for I have chosen you
2. Is God going to shake heavens, earth and destroy the nations again in the future?
Read Daniel 2:44, Isaiah 51:6, Luke 21:33, Isaiah 34:4, 2 Peter 3:10, and Revelation 21:1.
3. How should we live since everything in this earth will soon pass away?
We should live lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for Jesus' return (2 Peter 3:11-12). We should live as though our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20)
4. What is a Signet Ring? How was it used in Old Testament days?
A finger ring bearing an engraved signet was used by Kings and even royal officials to authenticate documents or messages. It was also called seal ring. In olden days, any official document issued by a person in authority is sealed with wax that has the impression of a signet ring which authenticates the sender. (See Esther 8:8b and Daniel 6:17)
5. Did God make Zerubbabel like a signet ring any time in history?
Jesus Christ was born in the 11th generation of Zerubbabel's lineage. He was given the privilege to be our Lord Jesus's ancestor. (Matthew 1:12-16)
6. Does God choose us as individuals for a divine purpose?
Yes. (Ephesians 1:4-6)
7. Does God seal us?
Yes. (Ephesians 4:30)
8. Zeal for God – Is it a good thing or a bad thing?
9. You may sing the song "Bind us together Lord" as a group to celebrate the fellowship of God and fellow Christians.
Bind us together, Lord, Bind us together
With cords that cannot be broken.
Bind us together, Lord,
Bind us together,
Bind us together with love.

There is only one God,
There is only one King;
There is only one Body,
That is why we sing:

Refrain

Made for the glory of God,
Purchased by His precious Son;
Born with the right to be clean,

For Jesus the victory has won.

Refrain

You are the family of God,
You are the promise divine;
You are God's chosen desire,
You are the glorious new wine.

Memory Verse

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,[a] but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Prayer

Dear God, we thank you for your promises, hope filled prophecies in the bible that helps us to look forward to your second coming to this earth. We thank you for choosing us before the foundations of the earth and sealing us with Holy Spirit for the day of redemption. Help us to live a holy and godly life and run with you to be like your signet ring. In Jesus's name we pray, Amen!