



Finish What You Start
Haggai

MEMORY VERSE

HAGGAI 1:7,8

“Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified,’ says the LORD.”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Rice, lentils and a small bowl.

Graham crackers, peanut butter, raisins, fruit snacks (or other creative things for decoration).

20 small paper or Styrofoam cups and a marker.

ATTENTION GETTER!

Rice and Lentils

In today’s lesson, we are going to learn the importance of finishing what we start for the Lord. Before class, fill a small bowl with a mixture of rice and lentils. They are small and look similar. At the start of class, choose one child as a volunteer. Tell him or her that you have a special job for them, and it is very important that they finish. Then give him the bowl and tell him that you need them to separate the rice from the lentils. This will take a long time. Give the student about 5 minutes just working at it. The rest of the class can work on their worksheets or another project.

After about five minutes, get everyone’s attention. Ask the volunteering student if they felt like finishing the work. Why or why not? Was it an easy job or a hard job? Did he/she feel like giving up? Explain that the Israelites were given a very important job to do (much more important than separating rice and lentils!). But they did not feel like finishing their job! They had set out to

build the temple of the Lord; but, they began to do what they wanted to do, instead. They built houses for themselves and neglected the work of the Lord.

Now, have all of the children work together and see how fast they can separate the rice from the lentils. Let's see what a prophet by the name of Haggai had to share with God's people about finishing what they started.

LESSON TIME!

Haggai, the prophet, preached during an exciting time of Israel's history. The Israelites had returned with much joy from their captivity in Babylon. They set out to rebuild the Temple of God in Jerusalem, which had been destroyed. But, through time, the building project was abandoned. Haggai, probably born in Babylon, was one of the first prophets to speak to the Israelites upon their return from captivity in Babylon. His message was clear: Continue with the Lord's work--finish what you have begun!

(Teacher note: For the full account of the rebuilding of the temple, see, also, the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Zechariah, and Malachi.)

HAGGAI 1:1-6

In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying,

"Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: 'This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built."' "

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?"

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."

Although the people had come back to the land to rebuild the temple of God, they faced some opposition and discouraging setbacks. Sadly, when they could once more resume their work, they had lost interest and become occupied with other things. They were building and working on their own houses while the work of the Lord was neglected. Haggai rebuked the people for not finishing God's house and working on their own houses instead. He encouraged them to finish the temple, even if the work is discouraging at times. *When God gives you a task, finish it!*

The people were excusing themselves saying, "The time is not come that the Lord's house should be built." How easy it is for us to make excuses for not doing something we know we should do, but do not want to do at the time. The children of Israel did that. Sadly, we often find the energy to exert in the things we want to do—such as going to a movie or other recreational activities—but neglect or put off sowing to spirit (reading your Bible and praying) and serving the Lord.

God reveals their hearts to them in verse 4 by saying, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" The prophet has cut off all excuses with this question. The people were living in houses with the inside walls covered or inlaid with costly woodwork, being a sign of luxury and comfort. The people were not neglecting the work of the Lord in order to take time to do the necessary things for survival; they were living in luxury and comfort. Their actions revealed their hearts. Their priorities were wrong. God desired to have first place in their hearts.

God called them to "consider their ways" or as the Hebrew reads, "Set their heart on their ways" or "to consider one's conduct, and lay it to heart." "Conduct" means behavior as shown by a person's actions.

Because of their neglect of the things of the Lord, they reaped no blessings. They had sown much, but brought only a little into their barns (the harvest of many years that had turned out badly). What they ate and drank was not enough to satisfy them; their clothes did not warm them, and their wages, which the laborer earned, vanished just as fast as if it had been put into a bag full of holes. Because they did not seek the Lord first, their needs were not being met. Matthew 6:33 tells us, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." This is God's promise for us. **When God gives you a task, finish it!**

HAGGAI 1:7-11

Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!

"Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD.

"You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?"

says the LORD of hosts. "Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house.

"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."

Again, in verse 7, God through the prophet Haggai tells the people to "consider their ways" and choose the way that is well pleasing to God. God gives them a way to correct their actions by submitting to His plan for them. He directs them to go and get wood and build the house. God will then "take pleasure in it and be glorified."

When the people turned from God and fixed their eyes on "much," what they desired turned to "little." They brought into the house what was reaped, and God blew into it, to cause it to fly away like chaff before the wind. The Lord asked the people, "Why?" and then answered their question: "Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house."

Ironside says, "Aroused from the deadening effects of self-seeking, judge ourselves and your past loose ways in God's presence; then 'Put first things first,' as one has said, and give the Lord the supreme place in heart and life." As God was neglected, so was His house.

Because of their care for only their own houses, "the heaven withholds the dew, and the earth its' fruit." Drought and barrenness came to them in place of blessing and sustenance. **When God gives you a task, finish it!**

Memory Verse Tower

To help the children remember their memory verse for this week have the children make a "memory verse tower." You will need 20 small paper or Styrofoam cups and a marker. Before class, write the following portion of the memory verse for this week, "Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Consider your ways!'" *Note: Follow these instructions to make the tower work.* Write, "Now, therefore" on the first cup right side up. On cup two, turn it upside down and write, "thus says," the third cup should be right side up and say, "the LORD," the fourth cup is upside down and should say "of hosts:" and finally the last cup will be right side up and say "consider your ways!" Make four sets of these five cups.

In class, separate your students into four groups. Tell them the verse once or write it on the board and then after reviewing it erase it. Then when you say "go!" it will be up to each team to stack a tower (in order from top to bottom) of the memory verse. The first team with a tower standing with the verse in the correct order wins. Continue playing until the children tire of the game.

HAGGAI 1:12-15

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

Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, spoke the Lord's message to the people, saying, "I am with you, says the LORD."

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.

The people heard God's admonition. They "considered their ways." Their response was obedience, and they went back to work! The first fruit of their hearing and obeying God's Word was the fear (the deep respect) of the Lord in their lives; the second fruit was that they resumed the building of the temple.

In 1:13, we read, "I am with you, says the Lord." What a wonderful assurance we have. When God calls us to do something, we are not alone; we are not dependent on our own sufficiency; He is with us! Note: It was God who stirred the spirit of Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the people. As they yielded in obedience, God gave them the strength and willingness to carry out His work. In Philippians 2:13 we read, "...it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. **When God gives you a task, finish it!**

The people, now filled with joy, courage, and strength began the work on the 24th day of the 6th month in the second year of king Darius. It was only 24 days after Haggai had first spoken to them God's word! Most of God's prophets were not blessed to see such results.

HAGGAI 2:1-9

In the seventh month, on the twenty-first of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying:

"Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying:

'Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing?

'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!'

"For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land;

'and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts.

'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts.

'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts."

The rebuilding had been going on now for less than a month when the word of the Lord came a second time to the people through Haggai, the prophet. Although the last message was one of rebuke, this was a message of encouragement both to the rulers and the people.

Haggai 2:1 tells us it was on the 21st day of the seventh month, which was the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles. This was the great festival of rejoicing, on which Israel was to give thanks for the gracious guidance that they had received through the wilderness, as well as for the blessing of the ingathering of all the fruits of the ground.

In verse three, three questions are asked: "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? And how do you see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" The first question is addressed to the old men, who had seen Solomon's temple in all its glory. The second question goes with the first, in what condition do you see it now? God knew what they were thinking. Perhaps their joy of seeing the new temple completed was mixed with discouragement as they recalled the glory of the former temple. God knew their need for encouragement and addresses them. God encourages them to be strong and to work, for He was with them.

Now, God points His people to a future day when the temple will be even more glorious than in the days of Solomon. God declares, "I will shake all nations,..." (referring to the Great Tribulation--the time of God's judgment upon the earth) "...and they shall come to the Desire of all nations" (referring to Jesus Christ at His second

coming which will follow the Great Tribulation). At that time, the millennial reign, the glory of God will once again fill the temple. And, Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, will give peace.

Again, looking back at 2:6, we read, “For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land’”; and in 2:7 we read, “I will shake all the nations.” At the time of God’s judgment upon the earth, the Great Tribulation, everything that is moveable will be shaken; only the immovable will remain. Concerning that day of God’s judgment, we read in 2 Peter 3:11,12: “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God...”

HAGGAI 2:10-19

On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying,

"Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Now, ask the priests concerning the law, saying,

"If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?" "Then the priests answered and said, "No."

And Haggai said, "If one who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean?" So the priests answered and said, "It shall be unclean."

Then Haggai answered and said, "'So is this people, and so is this nation before Me,' says the LORD, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.

'And now, carefully consider from this day forward: from before stone was laid upon stone in the temple of the LORD—

'since those days, when one came to a heap of twenty ephahs, there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty baths from the press, there were but twenty.

'I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not turn to Me,' says the LORD.

'Consider now from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid—consider it:

'Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded fruit. But from this day I will bless you.'

God asked them to consider their condition now, this day onward. They were to think about the present blessing they were experiencing; and they were to remember the misery they had once experienced as there was a drought in the land and they labored fruitlessly. Why were they now enjoying God's blessing--the seed was in the barn, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree yielded fruit?

God's people would have clearly seen the picture. When the people neglected the work of the Lord, times were rough and there was not enough to go around. When they once more began to commit themselves to the work of the Lord, God committed Himself to blessing them. Their priorities were no long skewed. God became first in their lives once more. God tells them to "mark this day"—the day the people put Him first. From that day, forward, God's blessing would be upon them. They would have plenty. God would take care of them. **When God gives you a task, finish it!**

HAGGAI 2:20-23

And again the word of the LORD came to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying,

"Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying: 'I will shake heaven and earth.

I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I will destroy the strength of the Gentile kingdoms. I will overthrow the chariots And those who ride in them; The horses and their riders shall come down, Every one by the sword of his brother.

'In that day,' says the LORD of hosts, '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 hosts."

In Matthew 1:12-17, we learn that Zerubbabel was a descendant of King David and in the line of the Messiah. Though the day of God's judgment would come, God would preserve Zerubbabel and the children of Israel.

The book of Haggai has some great lessons to be learned. First and most importantly, put God first. God promises to provide your every need if you seek Him first.

Second, don't spin your wheels! All your labor and productivity will be in vain if your priorities are wrong. It will be like putting your money into a bag with a hole in the bottom. God's blessing is much more important than your own abilities or productivity.

Third, when God corrects you and warns you, listen and respond immediately. Remember, God told the people to mark the day they yielded in obedience to Him and resumed the building of the temple. It was then that things turned around for them. They began to experience God's blessings.

Fourth: When you are discouraged, remember God is with you! If God is with you, He is all you need. The outward circumstances, however troubling, are not important in comparison.

And, when God gives you a task, finish it! God is our strength and the one who equips and enables us to do what He has called us to do. **When God gives you a task, finish it!**

Graham Cracker Temples

Have fun allowing the children to build their own temple with graham crackers. You will need graham crackers, peanut butter, raisins, fruit snacks (or other creative things for decoration). Review today's lesson and allow the children to make their own temple using the ingredients listed above. After they make a nice temple have a snack time and allow them to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to seek God first, keeping their priorities right, and to finish the tasks God gives them. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity.