

# **Rising from the Rubble**

## **Haggai 1:1-15 (NRSVue)**



YOU'RE REMODELING YOUR KITCHEN, but it stalls. Money runs short, or the work crew strikes. Something happens. Work stops. You cook with bare plaster walls, cabinets in boxes. Where's the frying pan?

This happened to the Jews who returned from exile in Babylon. They began to rebuild the Lord's temple. Then the project stalled. For sixteen years!

They focused on their own lives, built lavish homes and restored the city defenses. But God's temple remained in ruins—forgotten as other concerns claimed first place.

### **Re-Evaluate Your Priorities**

This is when God sent the prophet Haggai to call the people. He explained the problem. "Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house" (Hag. 1:2). So the Lord asked the people, "Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?" (Hag. 1:4) Then God gave the people an assignment: "Consider how you have fared" (Hag. 1:5). In other words, re-evaluate your priorities.

The people who returned from exile set about rebuilding their lives—finding work, settling into homes, restoring routines. While God's house lay unscented by the incense of prayer, their homes were perfumed with cedar and comfort. They neglected God's house. So God urged them to reconsider what mattered most.

Isn't this happening today?

People are dissatisfied with life. They're tired of illness, bickering, and politics. So why am I sad, lonely, frustrated, and poor? Life's in shambles. Why doesn't God bless me?

When life feels as if God's against you, Jesus says, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn.

10:10). The Lord doesn't look for reasons to oppose you. He's always seeking what's best for you.

In Haggai 1, the Lord God says to the Jewish returnees: "Consider how you have fared." Or, worded differently, listen to the echo of your days. What melody have you been singing? That is, check your priorities.

If you feel as though life works against you, it might be time to reassess what truly matters. Ask yourself, "Where does God belong in my daily rhythm?"

## **Recognize Your Emptiness**

God then held a mirror to the Israelites' lives and reflected on their troubles. "You have sown much and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes" (Hag. 1:6). They wanted many things, and the little they brought home blew away.

"Why?" asked God. He answered, "Because my house lies in ruins, while all of you hurry off to your own houses" (Hag. 1:9). God withheld the dew and produce. He sent a drought to devastate humans and animals. He warned them and called them back to himself.

You've sown much, but the harvest tastes like ash. You eat, but the flavor fades. You drink, but you sip from a cracked cup. You clothe yourselves, but the chill still nibbles. You earn, but the sweetness of success leaks away.

The hole in the bag isn't torn by chance—it's torn by neglect. When we push Jesus to the margins, we create the emptiness we try to fill with everything else.

Consider your priorities and put God first.

People today have lofty goals. But God isn't on the list of things they seek. It's no wonder we have much and enjoy it little. Why do we expect inner peace when we haven't invited the Prince of Peace into our lives? How can we

expect to have loving, supportive families when we lock Jesus out of our homes?

The major cause of what ails our lives and society is this: God and his peaceful ways are not in our picture of the good life. Recognize the emptiness only Jesus fills.

## **Respond with Your Actions**

Then the story of Haggai and Israel takes a remarkable turn. God called the leaders and the people, and they “...obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the words of the prophet Haggai, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people feared the Lord” (Hag. 1:12). Then God promised: “I am with you, says the Lord” (Hag. 1:13).

This is stunning. Most prophets were dismissed, their warnings unheeded. The result? People faced a penalty. They were exiled to Babylon. But after the exile, the people were warned *and obeyed*. They turned back to God, and as we’ll see in the weeks ahead, God blessed them.

The good news of Haggai is that it’s never too late to be raised from the rubble. To repent, change direction, and do God’s will.

Jesus of Nazareth gave the same message after John the Baptist was arrested: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Mt. 4:17), and people came to Christ for a new and better life.

SO TODAY, RISE FROM THE RUBBLE OF LIFE. Turn around. Fix your eyes on Christ and his way of life. Like returning exiles, let’s hear God’s word and obey.

Come, Lord Jesus! Make us your faithful people.

**Amen**

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