

Introduction to Haggai
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Author:

The author of the book is the prophet Haggai (Hag 1:1; 2:1). His name in Hebrew (חַגַּי *Chaggay*) means *festal*. Because of a comment in Haggai 2:2-3, many scholars believe Haggai was an older man, perhaps near age 70, who saw and remembered the first temple before it was destroyed in 586 B.C.

Audience:

Haggai spoke “to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest” (Hag 1:1), “to the remnant of the people” (Hag 2:2), to “the priests” (Hag 2:11), and finally “to Zerubbabel governor of Judah” alone (Hag 2:21).

Date of Ministry:

Haggai was a post-exile prophet who ministered at the same time as Ezra and Zechariah (Ezra 4:5, 24; Zec 1:1). He received his divine revelation “In the second year of Darius the king” (Hag 1:1). Darius I was king of Persia, who reigned from 522-486 B.C. The book of Haggai consists of four messages that were preached over a four-month period (Hag 1:1; 2:1, 10, 20), from “the first day of the sixth month” (Hag 1:1), to “the twenty-fourth of the ninth month” (Hag 2:10). The date range was between August 29th through December 18th, 520 B.C., with two messages delivered on the same day (Hag 2:10, 20). All four of Haggai’s messages were necessary to keep the work of the temple going.

Historical Background:

- 605 B.C. – First Jewish deportation into Babylon (Daniel).
- 597 B.C. – Second Jewish deportation into Babylon (Ezekiel).
- 586 B.C. – Third Jewish deportation into Babylon (Solomon’s temple destroyed).
- 538 B.C. – Israelites return to land under decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-4).
- 536 B.C. – Israelites start rebuilding temple (Ezra 3:8).
- 536 B.C. – Temple reconstruction stops because of opposition (Ezra 4:1-5, 24).
- 520 B.C. – God calls Israelites to finish rebuilding the temple (Hag 1:14-15).
- 516 B.C. – Temple reconstruction finished (Ezra 6:15).

Most of the Jews living in Judah went into Babylonian captivity when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 586 B.C. Without a temple and altar, the Israelites could not worship God as the Mosaic Law prescribed. It was during this time of Babylonian captivity that synagogues were formed, likely to fellowship, read the Law, and pray. We know Daniel prayed facing Jerusalem (Dan 6:10). After the fall of Babylon, the Medo-Persian empire came to power, and Cyrus, King of Persia, was favorable to the Jews and permitted nearly 50,000 exiles to return to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. (Ezra 1:1-4; Isa 44:28). At that time, they'd begun reconstruction of the second temple by building the altar and laying the foundation [Ezra 3:1-13]; however, the reconstruction stopped because of local opposition from the Samaritans who discouraged them (Ezra 4:1-5, 24; 5:16). This pause in construction lasted 16 years, during which time, the Israelites began to build their own homes (Hag 1:2-4). Apparently, the people became apathetic concerning temple reconstruction, so the Lord raised up Haggai and Zechariah to reignite the fire of doing the Lord's work. Their preaching proved successful.

Haggai's Message:

Five times Haggai called his fellow Israelites to "consider" their ways (Hag 1:5, 7; 2:15, 18). This consideration helped them look at their lives from the divine perspective and realize they were not being blessed because of their disobedience to God's will; specifically, their neglect of rebuilding the temple (Hag 1:5-11). Their judgments were consistent with the curses of Deuteronomy 28. God revealed there was a connection between His house and their lives, both of which were in ruin and need of repair. Haggai (and Zechariah) was called by God to encourage his fellow Israelites to restart temple construction in 520 B.C., and it worked (Hag 1:13-14; 2:4; cf. Ezra 5:1-2; 6:14). The message of encouragement motivated them to overcome their fears and work on the temple, which was completed around 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:15).

Outline:

1. God rebuked and redirected Israel to finish rebuilding the temple (Hag 1:1-15).
2. God encouraged Israel to rebuild the temple, with a promise of future glory (Hag 2:1-9).
3. God promised blessing on Israel (Hag 2:10-19).
4. God promised to protect and bless Zerubbabel (Hag 2:20-23).

Haggai 1:1-15

In the second year of Darius the king [520 B.C.], on the first day of the sixth month [August 29], the word of the LORD [יהוה *Yhvh* – God’s covenant name] came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah [the post-exilic leader; see Ezra 2:2], and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest [the post-exilic priest who reinstated temple worship; see Zec 3:1], saying, ² “Thus says the LORD of hosts [lit. *LORD of the armies*, “the LORD who rules over all” NET], ‘This people says [i.e. the Jews who had returned from Babylonian exile], “The time has not come, *even* the time for the house of the LORD to be rebuilt.’” [perhaps because they were afraid the persecution would restart; see [Ezra 4:1-5, 24; 5:16](#)] ³ Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, ⁴ “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house *lies* desolate?” [challenging their misplaced priorities] ⁵ Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, “Consider your ways!” [i.e. consider the path you’ve chosen and the circumstances of your life; cf. Hag 1:5, 7; 2:15, 18] ⁶ “You have sown much, but harvest little; *you* eat, but *there is* not enough to be satisfied; *you* drink, but *there is* not enough to become drunk; *you* put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages *to put* into a purse with holes [Though they worked hard, God withheld His blessing, because they were pursuing self-interest above His will; see [Lev 26:18-20; Deu 28:38-39; cf. Pro 3:9-10; Matt 6:33](#)].” ⁷ Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Consider your ways!” ⁸ “Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple [so the people can worship], that I may be pleased with it and be glorified,” says the LORD. ⁹ “*You* look for much, but behold, *it comes* to little; when you bring *it* home, I blow it *away*. Why?” declares the LORD of hosts, “Because of My house which *lies* desolate, while each of you runs to his own house [ignoring God’s will brings self-harm].” ¹⁰ “Therefore, because of you [and the path they’ve chosen] the sky has withheld its dew and the earth has withheld its produce. ¹¹ “I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands.” ¹² 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 [Haggai received a positive response to his preaching]. And the people showed reverence for the LORD [i.e. feared Him]. ¹³ Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke by the commission of the LORD to the people saying, “‘I am with you,’ declares the LORD.” [i.e. with you to accomplish His will] ¹⁴ So the LORD stirred up [Hebrew verb עורר *ur* – to rouse, stir - hiphil stem = caused to be stirred up, cf. [2 Chron 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4](#)] 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, ¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month [Haggai's message came on the first day of the month (vs. 1), and the people responded twenty-three days later, on September 21] in the second year of Darius the king [520 B.C.].

Summary:

God directed Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, to support the return of 50,000 exiled Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem, as well as the rebuilding of the temple, which began in 536 B.C. (Ezra 1:1-4; Isa 44:28). The Jews built the altar and laid the foundation (Ezra 3:1-13), but got discouraged and ceased construction after experiencing persecution from local Samaritans (Ezra 4:1-5, 24; 5:16). For the years that followed, self-interest took priority over divine-interest, as Israelites spared no expense for their own properties, while maintaining a sparing attitude toward the work of the Lord (Hag 1:3). Finally, after sixteen years, God raised up Haggai (and Zechariah) to preach and motivate the returned exiles to finish what they'd started. He told them to "consider your ways" (Hag 1:5), and pointed out the failed state of their lives (Hag 1:6). Though they worked hard, God withheld His blessing, because they were pursuing self-interest above His will and were experiencing the curse specified in the Mosaic Law (Lev 26:18-20; Deu 28:22-24; 38-39). The Lord was revealing the connection between His house and their lives, both of which were in ruin and need of repair. After telling them a second time to "consider your ways" (Hag 1:7), God gave a very specific command, saying, "Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified" (Hag 1:8). Then, for a second time, God explained there was a connection between their failed agricultural efforts (Hag 1:9a) and their failure to do His will, saying it was "Because of My house which *lies* desolate, while each of you runs to his own house" (Hag 1:9b). The Lord told them, "Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew and the earth has withheld its produce. I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands" (Hag 1:10-11). The Israelites responded positively to Haggai's preaching, as Zerubbabel, Joshua, and 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 showed reverence for the LORD" (Hag 1:12). To help encourage His people, the Lord told them, "I am with you" (Hag 1:3). There is a sense in which God is always with us and never leaves us; that is, His presence never departs. But there is another sense in which God is either with or against us, and this has to do with His blessing or discipline, which depends on our obedience or disobedience to His will. It is this

latter sense that God would be with His people to help them do His will. This same encouraging language is employed throughout the Bible with Isaac (Gen 26:24), Jacob (Gen 28:15), Moses (Exo 3:12), Joshua (Deu 31:23) Gideon (Jud 6:16), Jeremiah (Jer 1:8, 19; 15:20), Israel as a nation (Isa 41:10; 43:5; Jer 30:11; 46:28), the disciples (Mat 28:20), and us as Christians (Heb 13:5). Haggai preached God's Word, but it was the Lord who worked in the hearts of Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant of the people as "they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God" (Hag 1:14). Haggai tells us the work started three weeks later, "on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of Darius the king" (Hag 1:15). Why mention three weeks? It was harvest season and three weeks might have been required to bring in crops, or perhaps that was the time needed to organize the material for temple construction. Whatever the reason, the people responded positively to Haggai's preaching and focused their attention on doing God's will and rebuilding the temple.

Haggai 2:1-9

On the twenty-first of the seventh month [October 17th, 520 B.C., nearly a month after the Israelites started rebuilding the temple on September 21, 520 B.C. (Hag 1:14-15)], the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet saying, ² “Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah [political leader], and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest [religious leader], and to the remnant of the people saying [remnant = those who returned from Babylonian captivity in 538 B.C.], ³ ‘Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? [i.e. saw Solomon’s temple, which had been destroyed 66 years earlier in 586 B.C.] And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison? [The new temple was obviously less glorious than Solomon’s temple, and this discouraged the workers who had seen its former grandeur] ⁴ ‘But now take courage [חָזַק *chazaq* – to be firm, strong, strengthened], Zerubbabel,’ declares the LORD, ‘take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage,’ declares the LORD, ‘and work; for I am with you,’ declares the LORD of hosts [with you = to support as they do God’s will; here stated a second time; cf. Hag 1:13]. ⁵ ‘As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!’ [Just as God was with the Israelites in Moses’ day, so He is with them in Haggai’s day] ⁶ “For thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth [like He had done at Mount Sinai; Ex 19:18], the sea also and the dry land [at the Second Coming of Christ; see Matt 24:29-30; Heb 12:26-29]. ⁷ ‘I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations [to Jerusalem], and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD of hosts [both His personal glory (see 1 Ki 8:10-11), as well as the glory of the wealth of the nations (see Isa 60:5-7)]. ⁸ ‘The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,’ declares the LORD of hosts. ⁹ ‘The latter glory of this house [i.e. the temple during the millennial kingdom] will be greater than the former [Solomonic temple],’ says the LORD of hosts [the word is sure], ‘and in this place I will give peace [from conflict],’ declares the LORD of hosts.”

Summary:

The *Central Idea of the Text* is that God encourages His people to take courage and continue to work on the temple. The opening verse informs us that God had sent a second message to Haggai nearly a month after the people began working on rebuilding the second temple (Hag 2:1). The time frame would be October 17th to September 21st, 520 B.C. The message was directed 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” (Hag 2:2). Apparently enough of the temple’s

reconstruction was finished that people could see what the final form was going to look like, and the older Israelites who had seen Solomon's temple began to get discouraged. Haggai addressed them with three questions, saying, "Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison?" (Hag 2:3). The new temple would be as "nothing in comparison" to the old temple, and Haggai did not try ignore the obvious. But the older group needed to get past their disappointment, which might have derailed the work of the new temple, as simple and inglorious as it was in comparison to the Solomonic temple. A functional temple was better than no temple at all, as it would allow the Israelites to resume their worship as the Mosaic Law prescribed. Three times God told the leadership and people to "take courage" and to "work", saying, "for I am with you, declares the LORD of hosts" (Hag 2:4). The mental comparison that was being made by the people nearly crippled the work that God wanted done. Rather than rebuke them, He gave them words of encouragement, saying, "As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!" (Hag 2:5). It's possible that many Israelites had felt that God was not with them as He'd been in the days when they were first called out of Egypt and established as a nation. Just as He'd promised to be with their forefathers when they came out of Egyptian captivity, so He was now saying His "Spirit is abiding" in their midst. God's presence and promises strengthen the soul and dispel fear. And, just as God had shaken the earth at Mount Sinai when He entered into a covenant with them (Ex 19:18), so He told this generation, "Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land" (Hag 2:6). This work of God would not occur in their lifetime, but in the future, when Christ returns and builds a glorious temple that will function during His millennial reign. At that time, God declares, "I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory" (Hag 2:7). That is, God will summon the Gentile nations of the world to bring their wealth to Jerusalem and it will come into the temple. God can do this because He owns everything, saying, "'The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,' declares the LORD of hosts" (Hag 2:8). So, even though the temple in Haggai's day would be simple, the millennial temple will be more glorious than Solomon's temple, as the Lord states, "'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and in this place I will give peace,' declares the LORD of hosts'" (Hag 2:9). "The restored building had nothing of the splendor of Solomon's temple, but it was still God's house, built according to His plan and for His glory. The same ministry would be performed at its altars and the

same worship presented to the Lord. Times change, but ministry goes on.”¹ The future Israelites living in the millennial kingdom will receive the wealth of the Gentile nations (Isa 60:5-7), much like their forefathers had received the wealth of Egypt when they were liberated from captivity (Ex 3:21-22; 11:2-3; 12:35-36). For the Israelites, faith in God and His promises suppressed their fears and provided the courage to stand and do His will.

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Heroic*, “Be” Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: ChariotVictor Pub., 1997), 72.

Haggai 2:10-23

On the twenty-fourth of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius [December 18th, 520 B.C., three months after the temple reconstruction resumed; cf. Hag 1:14-15], the word of the LORD came to Haggai the prophet, saying, ¹¹ “Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Ask now the priests *for* a ruling: ¹² ‘If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment [*holy meat = set apart for sacrifice to the Lord and used as He instructed; see Lev 3:1-17*], and touches [*common foods such as*] bread with this fold, or cooked food, wine, oil, or any *other* food, will it become holy?’” [i.e. will it transfer its holiness?] And the priests answered, “No.” ¹³ Then Haggai said, “If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these [Num 19:11], will *the latter* become unclean?” [i.e. will it transfer its uncleanness?] And the priests answered, “It will become unclean.” ¹⁴ Then Haggai said, “‘So is this people. And so is this nation before Me,’ declares the LORD, ‘and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean [*their disobedience infected everything they touched, making their sacrifices unacceptable to God*]. ¹⁵ ‘But now, do consider from this day onward: before one stone was placed on another in the temple of the LORD [*reflecting on the previous sixteen years going back to 536 B.C.*], ¹⁶ from that time *when* one came to a *grain* heap of twenty *measures*, there would be only ten [50% yield]; and *when* one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there would be *only* twenty [40% yield]. ¹⁷ ‘I smote you *and* every work of your hands with blasting wind, mildew and hail [*God administered discipline during those years*]; yet you *did not come back* to Me,’ declares the LORD [*they did not respond to His corrective discipline*]. ¹⁸ ‘Do consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth *month*; from the day when the temple of the LORD was founded, consider: ¹⁹ ‘Is the seed still in the barn? Even including the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree, it has not borne *fruit*. Yet from this day on I will bless *you*.’” [An encouraging word from the Lord that their situation would turn around because they turned around and started doing His work] ²⁰ Then the word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month [December 18th, 520 B.C.], saying, ²¹ “Speak to Zerubbabel governor of Judah, saying, ‘I am going to shake the heavens and the earth [*at the Second Coming of Christ*]. ²² ‘I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the power of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down, everyone by the sword of another.’ ²³ ‘On that day,’ [i.e. the future Day of the Lord] declares the LORD of hosts, ‘I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you,’” declares the LORD of hosts.

Summary:

God spoke to Haggai and gave him two messages on the same day. The first message was to the priests, informing them that the nation's disobedience in not building the temple was the reason God withheld His blessings, which He reinstated once they returned to Him. The Second message was to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, encouraging him that God had chosen him for a special purpose and would use him as a signet ring. In the first message, God spoke through Haggai to the priests concerning things holy (Hag 2:10-11), asking, "If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches bread with this fold, or cooked food, wine, oil, or any *other* food, will it become holy? And the priests answered, 'No.'" (Hag 2:12). Holy meat was set apart for sacrifice to the Lord and to be used as He instructed (Lev 3:1-17). The priests correctly understood that if something holy touched something common, the holiness was not transferable. Haggai then posed another question, asking, "If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will *the latter* become unclean?" And the priests answered, 'It will become unclean'" (Hag 2:13). Again, the priests answered correctly, that uncleanness is transferable. A similar principle is found in everyday life, as sickness can be transferred, but not health; and bad food will ruin good food if it comes into contact; and dirty water will contaminate clean water; and bad associations will corrupt good associations; whereas the reverse of all these is not possible. Haggai then explained, "'So is this people. And so is this nation before Me,' declares the LORD, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean'" (Hag 2:14). The point of Haggai's message was that the nation had become spiritually defiled because of their disobedience to the Lord, which in turn contaminated all their work, including the sacrifices they were offering to God. Previously, for sixteen years, while the temple remained unfinished, God had smitten their crops, reducing their yield by 50 and 60 percent, in an effort to correct their behavior and draw them back to Him (Hag 2:15-17). Finally, they responded and turned their hearts back to the Lord and became obedient to His will, and three times He told them He would bless the work of their hands, "from this day onward" (Hag 2:15; 18-19). It should be noted that the season for sowing was several months out, so God's promised blessings did not immediately appear, but took time, following the normal cycle of planting and harvesting. Their blessing would come because they applied the principle of putting God first in their lives (see Matt 6:33). Next, God gave Haggai a second message on the same day which was directed at Zerubbabel, the nation's governor (Hag 2:20). Zerubbabel was the grandson of Jehoiachin (aka Jeconiah/Coniah) and in the royal line of King David (Matt 1:12); however, rather than wearing a crown, he struggled as the governor of a nation recently returned from captivity. But God singled him out for an encouraging message about the nation's future stability, saying, "I am

going to shake the heavens and the earth. I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the power of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down, everyone by the sword of another” (Hag 2:21-22). This will happen at the Second Coming of Christ when He puts down the nations of the world and establishes His millennial kingdom. God also honors Zerubbabel by calling him “My servant” and declaring “I will make you like a signet *ring*, for I have chosen you” (Hag 2:23). Zerubbabel would be God’s servant who carried His authority to do His will. Most Bible scholars see Zerubbabel as an archetype of Jesus who will come and reign, but it is possible this speaks of his future resurrection with a place of prominent rulership under Messiah. Either way, it is clear that God is the One who “removes kings and establishes kings” (Dan 2:21), and all the kingdoms of this world are under His control (Dan 2:36-45). What God has promised, He will bring to pass (Isa 46:9-11).