

# HAGGAI

## Message :

*“Haggai is commissioned by God to exhort the remnant that it was **time** for them to return to the task of rebuilding God’s temple in order that the blessings associated with the Abrahamic (Gen. 15) and Davidic (2 Sam. 7:8-16) Covenants could be reinstated for the restored remnant (Hag. 1:12-14; 2:10-19) and be fully realized in the future when He encompasses the rebuilt temple with a glory that will outshine the former glory associated with Solomon’s temple when He sends forth Israel’s Redeemer, David’s Greater Son, the LORD Jesus Christ (Hag. 2:1-9; Ezek. 43:1-7).”*



*“These people say, the time has not yet come for the LORD’s house to be built” Haggai 1:2b*

## Title:

The Hebrew title *Haggai*, assigned to this short little book,<sup>1</sup> is thought to have come from the Hebrew word *ygj* which means “festival.”<sup>2</sup> The name Haggai can be translated “festival,” “festive,” “celebration,” or “feast of Yahweh.” This is a very appropriate name considering the prophet Haggai’s involvement in rebuilding the temple and restoring the returnees to proper worship, truly a work to be “celebrated.” Some scholars of the book have speculated that the prophet may have been born during one of the three major pilgrimage feasts (Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, or Tabernacles). Others have suggested that his name may be indicative of the joyous character of the prophetic predictions which he delivered. McIlmoyle, for example, writes that “Haggai was one of the few prophets [along with Zechariah and Nehemiah] who had the inexpressible pleasure of seeing the fruits of his message ripen right before his very eyes.”<sup>3</sup>

## Author:

Very little is known about the prophet Haggai apart from that which may be gleaned from his book (as well as from Ezra). Haggai referred to himself as “the prophet Haggai” (1:1; et al.). We know nothing about Haggai’s background, parents, ancestors, or tribal origin. His ministry as a postexilic prophet is corroborated by the postexilic Book of Ezra. Ezra makes mention of the fact that the prophets Haggai and Zechariah carried on a

ministry in which they exhorted the returned Jewish exiles to resume and complete the

<sup>1</sup>Haggai is the second shortest book in the Old Testament canon; only Obadiah is shorter.

<sup>2</sup>Carl Philip Weber, “*hag*,” in *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, et al, vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:261-63.

<sup>3</sup>J. McIlmoyle, “Haggai,” in *New Bible Commentary*, ed. D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer, rev ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 743.

restoration of the temple of the LORD their God (Ezra 5:1; 6:14; cf. Zech. 8:9).

Some have inferred from Haggai's reference in 2:3, to those who had seen the temple's former glory before the Babylonians destroyed it, that he too must have been a witness to the destruction of the Solomonic temple in 586. If this is the case, he would have been an elderly man in his 70s or even 80s during his postexilic ministry. However, it is not at all certain that 2:3 indicates that Haggai was alive and living in Judah during the time of the Babylonian destruction of the temple and following deportation in 586 B.C. It seems best to see Haggai as being born in Babylon during the 70 years of captivity.

### Date of Composition:

The prophet Haggai was among the first contingent of Jews to return to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, in 537 B.C. (Ezra 2:2). In addition, Haggai was the first prophet used by God to speak to the postexilic Judean community. Haggai delivered four prophetic messages to the restoration community, all of which were dated in the second year of King Darius I (Hystaspes) of Persia (520 B.C.).

Haggai's prophetic ministry was very brief, spanning less than four months, from the first day of the sixth month (1:1) to the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month (2:20). It has been observed that Haggai was quite possibly the most precise of all the prophets in dating his messages.<sup>4</sup> Haggai's first prophetic message (1:1) was delivered on the first day of the sixth month (Aug. 29, 520 B.C.). His second message (2:1) was delivered on the final day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the twenty-first day of the seventh month (Oct. 17, 520 B.C.). His third (2:10) and fourth messages (2:20) were delivered on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in King Darius' second year (Dec. 18, 520 B.C.). Note the contrast between Haggai's & Zechariah's messages:

Haggai	Zechariah
-focuses on the outward task of <i>rebuilding the temple physically</i>	-focuses on inward task of <i>rebuilding the remnant spiritually</i>
-centers primarily around the local situation (materialism of the day)	-universal in scope -eschatological and apocalyptic in outlook

### Recipients:

According to Haggai 1:1, the LORD instructed Haggai to deliver his first prophetic message to Zerubbabel, the appointed governor of Judah, and to *Jeshua* (a variant of *Joshua* or *Jesus*), the high priest. These two men were the acting political and spiritual leaders of the Jewish remnant of approximately 50,000 who had returned with Zerubbabel from exile in Babylon in 536 B.C. (Ezra 2:64-65). Haggai's second message is again directed to these two

<sup>4</sup>Thomas L. Constable has observed that both Haggai and Zechariah evidence the precision in the dating of their prophecies "that marks the annalistic style of history writing that distinguished Neo-Babylonian and Persian times. Ezekiel, an older contemporary of these prophets, was the third most precise in dating his prophecies, and Daniel, another contemporary, also was precise but not as detailed. Likewise Ezra and Nehemiah, who wrote after Haggai and Zechariah, showed the same interest in chronological precision" ("Haggai" [notes published by *Sonic Light* and available on-line for downloading from [www.soniclight.com](http://www.soniclight.com), May 2000], 2).

leaders, along with “the remnant of the people” (2:1). The prophet’s third message was directed to the priests (2:11) with application to all of the people (2:14). The last message is spoken to Zerubbabel, who as the governor of Judah, serves as a type of Christ who will someday come to establish His kingdom rule over every nation of the world. It may be concluded that while these messages are directed primarily to Zerubbabel, the political ruler, and Joshua, the religious ruler, they are also applicable to all of the returning exiles.

### **Historical Background:**

On the night of October 12, 539 B.C., the seemingly invincible Babylonian empire fell to the invading Medo-Persian armies of King Cyrus, led by Darius the Mede. In conformity with his open religious policy of allowing exiled peoples to return to their native homeland, King Cyrus issued a royal edict in the first year of his reign (538 B.C.) permitting the captive Jews to return to Jerusalem to reestablish their heritage and rebuild their temple (see Ezra 1:24; 6:3-5).

According to Ezra 2–3 Sheshbazzar (“Zerubbabel’s” Babylonian name, cf. 5:16 with Zech 4:9), the Persian-appointed civil governor over Judea, and Jeshua, the high priest, led some 42,360 Jewish people, with an additional 7,334 servants, (49,897) back to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple (Ezra 1:2-4; 6:3-5).<sup>5</sup> It is estimated that the journey of approximately 530 direct miles from Babylon to Canaan (about 900 traveling miles) would have taken at least four months to complete (cf. Ezra 7:8-9). After arriving in Jerusalem and settling down in various cities (Ezra 3:1), the people came together as one man to Jerusalem on the first day of the seventh month (Sept 1, 537 B.C.). They rallied around Joshua, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, the governor, and completed the altar (three weeks later) and began to offer sacrifices by the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles which began on September 20, 537 B.C. (Ezra 3:2-4). The erecting of the altar on the first day of the seventh month coincided with the beginning of the Feast of Trumpets (Ezra 3:1-3; cf. Num. 29:1-6). The returnees continued by celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles which lasted from the 15th to the 22nd of the seventh month (see Lev. 23:34-43).

Work on the temple proper did not begin until the second month of the second year after the returnees coming to the house of God in Jerusalem (Ezra 3:8-10).<sup>6</sup> The second month began on April 29, 536 B.C. and was the same month that King Solomon had begun building his temple 430 years earlier (1 Kgs. 6:1).

The returning remnant’s zeal for rebuilding the house of God was short lived, however, as the Samaritans and other surrounding peoples, referred to as “the enemies of Benjamin and Judah” (Ezra 4:1), rose up in opposition and were able to secure an official government halt to the work on the temple that lasted for nearly fourteen years, until God raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah in 520 B.C. in order to encourage the people to repent of sin and finish rebuilding the house of God (Ezra 5:1-2).

Darius I (Hystaspes) succeeded Cambyses as the king of Persia in 522 B.C. In the second year of his reign (520 B.C.) Darius came across Cyrus’ earlier decree permitting the

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<sup>5</sup>Ezra led the second wave of 1,700 men plus women and children (perhaps about 5,000 individuals) back to Jerusalem in 458 B.C. Nehemiah led a third return in 444 B.C., but it is not certain how many Jews traveled back to the land at this time for the writer provided no numbers.

<sup>6</sup>It is interesting to note that the work on the temple proper commenced in the same month that King Solomon had begun building his magnificent temple 430 years earlier (1 Kgs 6:1). The postexilic temple was begun “in the second month of the second year after their arrival at the house of God in Jerusalem” (Ezra 3:8).

Jewish remnant to return to their homeland to rebuild the temple of their God (Ezra 1:1-4). In response to his discovery, Darius lifted the restrictions that had been placed on the Jews' temple rebuilding. In spite of Darius' royal edict allowing the Jews to resume work on the temple, they chose to remain in a state of spiritual apathy. The people placed their own personal building projects ahead of that of God's temple. The remnant insisted that ***“the time had not yet come to rebuild the temple of the LORD” (Hag. 1:2).***

Haggai and Zechariah were called on the scene by God in Darius' second year (520 B.C.) to arouse the people from their spiritual lethargy. **Haggai was the first prophetic voice of the postexilic period to exhort the people that it was indeed time for them to return to the task of rebuilding the temple of God** (Hag. 1:1-5; Ezra 5:1-2). Haggai's initial success in calling for the people to rebuild the temple was supplemented by the prophet Zechariah's ministry. With the continued support of Darius against Samaritan harassment (Ezra 5:3-6; 6:6-12), along with the combined efforts of Haggai and Zechariah, the temple was completed in 4 short years and dedicated to the LORD in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:15-18).

### **Theological Context:**

In Deuteronomy 30:1-10 the restoration promises are set forth as to what will happen after God has disciplined His people. The preexilic prophets also prophesied concerning the glorious future kingdom for the regathered and restored nation. Haggai is set in the context of the returned remnant not realizing what they come to expect from the Scriptures.

The postexilic writings have a number of related purposes as will be noted for each book that follows. In general, however, the purpose of these writings might be summarized as to establish hope among the remnant of the nation. The prophets of this period do this by interpreting the restoration of Jerusalem to the remnant. God's unconditional promises will not fail. The nation has proven herself both unable and unwilling to remain committed to Yahweh and serve Him as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” No longer are they a “monarchic-theocracy” but they have now entered into a “religious remnant” phase. ***They are a worshipping remnant under Gentile control.*** Still the promise of the seed of the woman (Christ) who will effect the victory over the seed of the serpent (Satan) is the hope that must be realized (Gen. 3:15). By envisioning both the providential care of Yahweh's people during the captivity and the restoration, not of the land but at least Jerusalem to the remnant as a token of the ultimate outcome in relationship, hope is nurtured.

### **Literary Features:**

As noted in the introduction, *Haggai is the second shortest book in the Old Testament*, next to Obadiah. Like Malachi, Haggai uses a number of questions to highlight key issues (see 1:4, 9; 2:3, 19). He also makes effective use of repetition: “Consider your ways” occurs in 1:5, 7; 2:15, 18 [twice], and “I am with you” in 1:13; 2:4. “I will shake the heavens and the earth” is found in 2:6, 21. The major sections of the book are marked off by the date on which the word of the LORD came “to” (or better, “through”) Haggai (1:1; 2:1, 10, 20).

Several times the prophet appears to echo other Scriptures (compare 1:6 with Deut 28:38-39 and 2:17 with Deut. 28:22). The threefold use of “Be strong” in 2:4 reflects the encouragement Yahweh gave to Joshua in Joshua 1:6-7, 9, 18.

Themes: Haggai clearly shows the *consequences of disobedience* (1:6, 11; 2:16-17) and *obedience* (2:7-9, 19). When the people give priority to God and His house, they are

blessed rather than cursed. Obedience brings the encouragement and strength of the Spirit of God (2:4-5).

Chapter 2, v. 7 speaks of the coming of the Messiah, called the “desired of all nations.” His coming would fill the rebuilt temple with glory (see 2:9). The Lord made Zerubbabel his “signet ring” as a guarantee that the Messiah would come (see 2:23). These passages are linked with the judgment of the nations at Christ’s second coming, when the Gentile nations will be shaken and kingdoms overthrown (see 2:6-7, 21-22; cf. Heb. 12:25-29).

### **Purpose(s):**

Haggai serves to stimulate the completion of the Temple by reviving their courage to build the Temple. When people give priority to God and His house, they are blessed rather than cursed. Obedience brings the encouragement of strength of the Spirit of God (Hag. 2:4-5). The temple must be completed by faith with a view to God’s ultimate blessing (Hag. 2:6-9). God’s ultimate blessing of Israel would come “in a little while” (Hag. 2:6); at a time when God would again “shake the heavens and the earth” (Hag. 2:6, 21).

### **Outline:**

#### **I. Haggai’s First Message: A Call to Rebuild the Temple of God 1:1-15**

##### **A. Introduction to the First Message 1:1-2**

1. Date: The second year of King Darius I, in the sixth month, the first day (August 29, 520 B.C.) 1:1a
2. Author: The prophet Haggai 1:1b
3. Addressees: 1:1c
  - a. Zerubbabel the governor—
  - b. Joshua the high priest—
4. Excuse of the people: “The time has not come for God’s temple to be rebuilt” 1:2

##### **B. Yahweh Rebukes the People Through Haggai for Their Refusal to Rebuild His Temple 1:2-11**

1. The reprimand 1:3-6
  - a. The people’s indulgence 1:3-4
  - b. The people’s cursed condition 1:5-6
    - 1) Insufficient harvest
    - 2) Insufficient food
    - 3) Insufficient drink
    - 4) Insufficient clothing
    - 5) Insufficient money
2. The remedy 1:7-8
  - a. The people are to consider their sinful ways and repent 1:7
  - b. The people are exhorted to continue the rebuilding of the temple 1:8

3. The rebuke 1:9-11
  - a. The people's perverted priorities are condemned by God 1:9
  - b. The people's agricultural problems stem from God's judgment 1:10-11
4. The reaction 1:12-15
  - a. The leaders and the remnant obey the LORD 1:12
    - 1) Zerubbabel's response 1:12a
    - 2) Joshua's response 1:12b
    - 3) Remnants' response 1:12c
  - b. The LORD promised that He would be with the people 1:13
  - c. The LORD stirred up all the workers and the rebuilding of the temple resumed 1:14
  - d. The date was September 20, 520 B.C. 1:15

## **II. Haggai's Second Message: A Call to Courage 2:1-9**

(The Temple they Build will be Filled with God's Glory 2:7, 9; cf. Ezek 43:1-7)

- A. Introduction to the Second Message 2:1-2
  1. Date: October 17, 520 B.C. 2:1
  2. Haggai's commission by Yahweh 2:2
- B. The People's Discouragement Over the Present Temple's Appearance 2:3
  1. The former temples dazzling glory 2:3a
  2. The latter temples despicable appearance 2:3b
- C. The LORD's Encouragement: The Rebuilt Temple Will Be Far More Glorious Than Solomon's Temple 2:4-9
  1. The present prospect of blessing 2:4-5
    - a. The call to be courageous 2:4
    - b. The certainty that God's Spirit would abide in their midst 2:5
  2. The promise of future glory and peace 2:6-9
    - a. The emptying of the nations' glory 2:6-7a
    - b. The filling of the temple with glory 2:7b-9
      - 1) God will bring wealth and glory to the temple 2:7b-9a
      - 2) God will bring peace to His righteous remnant 2:9b

## **III. Haggai's Third Message: A Call to Commitment and Holiness of Life 2:10-19; cf. Rom 12:1**

- A. Introduction to the Third Message 2:10
  1. Date: December 18, 520 B.C. 2:10a
  2. Haggai's commission by Yahweh 2:10b

- B. An Illustration of the Remnants Defilement: Principles of Moral Impurity 2:11-14
  - 1. Illustration #1: Holiness *cannot be* transferred by contact 2:11-12
  - 2. Illustration #2: Unholiness *can be* transferred by contact 2:13
  - 3. Application: The temple structure could not make the people holy, but the impurity (sins) practiced by the people could defile them and the temple they were building 2:14
  - 4. A promise of blessing following repentance: “I will bless you from this day on” 2:19b; see 1:12, 14
- C. The Nation’s Penalty for Moral Impurity 2:15-17
  - 1. Past judgment by God resulted in curses: scarcity 2:15-17a; cf. Deut 28:15-68
  - 2. Past obstinacy of the people 2:17b
- D. The Nation’s Promise of Future Blessings 2:18-19
  - 1. Present distress would result in blessings: abundance 2:18-19a; cf. Deut 28:1-14
  - 2. Promise of future hope and blessings 2:19b

#### **IV. Haggai’s Fourth Message: A Call to Confidence 2:20-23** **A Messianic Prophecy Detailing Christ’s future Reign in Glory**

- A. Introduction to the Fourth Message 2:20
  - 1. Haggai’s commission by Yahweh 2:20a
  - 2. Date: December 18, 520 B.C. 2:20b
- B. God’s Promise To Destroy All the Gentile Nations 2:21-22
  - 1. The shaking of the heavens and the earth 2:21
  - 2. The overthrow of Gentile nations and power 2:22
    - a. Overthrow of Gentile thrones and kingdoms 2:22a
    - b. Overthrow of Gentile armies 2:22b
- C. God’s Promotion of Zerubbabel As His Signet Ring: A Foreshadowing of God’s Ultimate Restoration of the Davidic Kingdom 2:23

#### **Argument:**

The Book of Haggai consists of four precisely dated prophetic messages from the LORD designed to encourage the leaders and the people who had returned to Judah from exile in Babylon to get busy and finish rebuilding the temple of the LORD, so Messiah could come.

**Haggai’s First Message** (1:1-15) was delivered in the second year of King Darius I, in the sixth month, the first day, which would have been August 29, 520 B.C.<sup>7</sup> Haggai was commissioned by God to deliver His message on a feast day when Jerusalem would have been filled with worshipping people. The people had insisted that “the time had not come

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<sup>7</sup>Judah’s postexilic calendar was derived from the Babylonian system of beginning the new year in the spring rather than in the fall (cf. Exod 23:16; 34:22), this date was the 1st of Elul (Aug. 29) 520 B.C.

for God's temple to be rebuilt" (1:2). Yahweh Rebukes the People through their leaders Zerubbabel, *the governor*, and Joshua, *the high priest*, for their refusal to rebuild His Temple (1:2-4). Haggai calls upon the people to begin rebuilding God's temple that had laid unfinished for far too long. He informed the people that the present hardships they were experiencing were a curse from God (1:5-6, 9-11). The remedy was quite simple, the people were to consider their sinful ways and repent (1:7), and continue the rebuilding of the temple (1:8). The people responded in obedience, and as a result, the LORD stirred up all the workers and the rebuilding of the temple resumed three weeks later on September 20, 520 B.C. (1:12-15).

*Haggai delivered his Second Message* on October 17, 520 B.C. (2:1-9). God informs the people through Haggai that they are not to be discouraged because the temple they were building was crude in comparison to Solomon's former glorious temple, for the rebuilt temple will be far more glorious than Solomon's former temple (2:4-9). The reason: because God's Son, the Davidic descendant, would Himself come to the temple.

*Haggai's Third Message* was delivered on December 18, 520 B.C. (2:10). God promises that the defilement of the people would be turned into blessing as the people repented and returned to God and to rebuilding His temple (2:10-19). He reminds the people that just as past disobedience resulted in His curses, highlighted by scarcity (2:15-17; cf. Deut. 28:15-68); so now, present obedience would result in blessings of abundance as He began to bless them for their obedience to His command to rebuild His temple (2:18-19; cf. Deut. 28:1-14).

*Haggai's Fourth and final Message* was delivered on the same day as his previous message, that is, on December 18, 520 B.C. (2:20b). God promises His faithful remnant through Zerubbabel, the civil governor, that the day would come when He will shake the heavens and the earth, and overthrow all of the Gentile nations and power (2:20-22). God promises Zerubbabel that in that future day of glory he will be promoted as God's signet ring, which serves as a foreshadowing of God's ultimate restoration of the Davidic Kingdom with the advent of David's greater Son, the Messiah, the LORD Jesus Christ (2:23).