

*Haggai*

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## Background

In the year 539 B.C. Cyrus II became ruler of the Persian empire by virtue of his conquest of Babylon. In this first year after ascending to the throne of Babylon he is moved by the Lord to declare by written proclamation his intention to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. To accomplish this he called on all Jews living in exile to return to Jerusalem to help in this effort. This was not total freedom for Judah because they remained under Persian rule for at least 70 more years. (2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:2-3)

To finance the rebuilding project Cyrus called upon all the people, whether returning or not, to provide a free-will offering. In addition Cyrus turned over to Sheshbazzar (Zerubbabel) all the treasures the Babylonians had taken in their three invasions of Jerusalem and the temple before it was destroyed. (Ezra 1:7-11)

Returning with the restored vessels of the temple were 42,360 people and 7,337 servants. (Ezra 2:64-65; Neh. 7:66-67) Among these were not only Judeans but also some Israelites of the northern tribes. (Ezra 2:70)

In the seventh month of this first year the people of Israel returned to what was their land. As the first order of business an altar was erected on the site of the destroyed altar. Since the feast of the tabernacles was observed in the seventh month this feast was also celebrated according to the covenant. (Ezra 3:1-4; Lev. 23:24)

Work began on the temple in the second month of the second year. The foundation was completed amid shouts of joy and weeping. (Ezra 3:8, 10, 13)

Hearing about the rebuilding of the temple the remnant of the ten tribes of Israel came to Zerubbabel to offer their help in the rebuilding project. This offer was rejected by the Jewish leaders. The reason for this refusal was because this remnant of northern Israel was not of pure Jewish descent, nor did they solely worship the one true God. (When Israel was taken into captivity the Assyrian king Esarhaddon deported many Jews replacing them with people of other conquered lands. The remnant of Israelites intermarried with the foreigners and became a new race named the Samaritans. The religious views of these people became a combination of idolatry and superstitious belief in God.)

The leaders of Judah recognized the possibility of foreign ideas once again coming in to pollute the true belief of the Jews. If they worked side by side with the Samaritans it could bring about friendships resulting in intermarriages and a return to past sins. (Ezra 4:1-3)

Because their help was rejected the Samaritans made it difficult for the Jews by obstruction the building in every way possible. This went on for about twenty years and not much progress was made on building the temple. (Ezra 4:4-6) Cyrus (539-530), Cambyses (530-522), and Darius I (522-486) were rulers in Persia during this time.

The building began in earnest in the second year of Darius' reign in the year 520. (Ezra 4:24) It was at this time that Haggai, and a short time later Zechariah, rebuked and stirred the people to begin the work.

## *Haggai*

It is believed Haggai saw the original temple and so his age is assumed to be over 70 at the time he spoke to the people. (Hag. 2:3) The oracles or prophecies are dated with great accuracy and therefore it appears his ministry was only four months long.

The book consists of four prophecies concerning the building of the temple.  
(1:5-11; 2:3-9; 2:16-17, 19; 2:21b-23)

***v.1:1 In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying,***

The people had been released by Cyrus in 539 B.C. for the express purpose of rebuilding the temple. It is now 520 B.C. (19 years later) and only an altar and foundation had been laid. Haggai now comes on the scene in the second year of Darius' reign as king of Persia. The second day of the sixth month equates to August 29th of the modern calendar.

The message Haggai brings from the Lord is to the two high ranking individuals now ruling over Israel. Zerubbabel is the governor appointed by Cyrus and Joshua is the high priest. To confirm their lawful positions their lineage is given. Zerubbabel is of the line of David (although not the direct line of kings) and Joshua is the lawful high priest being of the line of Aaron. (1 Chron. 3:17-19; Luke 3:27; 1 Chron. 6:1-15) These two individuals had the joint responsibility of getting the temple rebuilt.

***v.1:2 Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.***

The charge against the people was that they were no longer concerned about building the temple. Within a year of returning the people had lost their enthusiasm for getting the job done. They were giving excuses as to why the work should not and did not proceed.

The generalized excuse was that it was not yet time for the temple to be built. What time they were waiting for is not specifically mentioned but could be one of a number of different ones. 1) The seventy years since the destruction of the original temple had not yet passed. 2) The edict to build was no longer in force since Cyrus was now gone. 3) The Samaritans were making it difficult to work and when the time would come to build there would be friendlier relations. 4) It is to big a project and the people have not yet sufficiently recovered from the captivity.

***v.1:3 Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying,***

In response to the excuses given by the people the Lord through Haggai is about to comment on the attitude of the people.

***v.1:4 Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?***

The priorities of the people are challenged. The people had put themselves and their own comfort before the building of the temple. The "cieled houses" implies a certain amount of luxury afforded by an individual to himself while doing nothing for the Lord.

It was to their detriment that they did not have the desire and zeal of David and Solomon when it came to this large project. (2 Sam. 7:2; 1 Kings 5:5, 7-8)

***v.1:5 Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways.***

Their response to what he has just presented is that they were to reflect on their circumstances. The Hebrew could also say "set your heart on your ways". He is instructing

them to examine themselves, their thoughts and attitudes to be sure they are in tune with God's wishes. They are not to take these things lightly.

***v.1:6 Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.***

The people neglected God and focused on themselves. Haggai tells them their situation was not markedly changed for the better overall since they arrived back in Israel. Their harvests were not overly abundant. Their barns were not stocked full. Their food and clothing were adequate but not enough to bring satisfaction. What money they did make seemed to go out as fast as it came in.

Part of what they should consider is whether their self-serving attitude was getting them anywhere. The conclusion they should come to is that God would provide for them if they placed him first. (Prov. 13:7; 11:24; Matt.6:33)

***v.1:7 Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways.***

A repetition of verse 5. If the economic situation is not hard enough to dwell on there are even more things to consider.

***v.1:8 Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord.***

In order to build the temple materials would be needed. The wood for the interior of the temple would be taken from the hills around Jerusalem. It appears the fine wood from cedars in Lebanon would not be used in this temple. It is probably because of the cost involved and the connections to the government on Lebanon. (1 Kings 5,2, 8-11)

The pleasure God would take from the building is not in the temple itself but from the obedience of the people in fulfilling God's will. To give of themselves in God's service would be pleasing to him. The opposite is also true, to neglect to serve God is to neglect God himself.

It also brings glory to God when his people are obedient to him. When God is glorified he can show his glory by bestowing his grace on his people.

***v.1:9 Ye look for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts, Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.***

Through their own efforts they expected a great reward but instead little came from this effort. The more they expected the less they got. What they did bring home God blew on it. In other words they got poorer as God caused the increase to be wasted.

Why was this the case? All the while they neglected to take care of God's house. They ran home with the excuses as to why they couldn't work on the temple. Their families were

important and they had to provide for them but it looks like they were using the home and family as a way of getting around doing God's will.

***v.1:10 Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.***

It appears that for some time the weather conditions had been getting worse. The lack of moisture was causing the crop failure. Haggai tells them this is a direct result of their indifference toward God and the building of his temple. Since it was obvious the temple was neglected it would be difficult for the people to refute this claim.

***v.1:11 And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.***

Now that they have been reprimanded for their inactivity further neglect would bring on more severe problems. A drought was in the future as punishment. This drought, as in the past, would affect every aspect of the economy.

***v. 1:12 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, 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 did fear before the Lord.***

The response to Haggai's message is positive. The leaders and the people recognize Haggai's authority and their sin concerning the temple. The people responding are the "remnant", those who returned from captivity.

The message had a definite impact on the people because they did "fear before the Lord". Remembering the experiences of the past made them ready and willing to accept the call of God.

***v.1:13 Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord.***

Any worries or concerns about giving of their time and resources should be forgotten. The promise of God is that he would be with them and he would remove any obstacles that would stand in their way. (Matt. 28:20; Rom. 8:31)

***v.1:14 And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son to Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God,***

Recognizing the work must be done will not get the work done. The people must be motivated to actually do the work. God provides the impetus behind the project by instilling the desire within the people. God is behind the efforts of man.

*v.1:15 In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.*

And so twenty three days after the initial message from Haggai the people began the building of the temple on the foundation laid twenty years earlier. It was the 24th day of the sixth month.

***v.2:1-2 In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, cam the word of the Lord by the prophet Haggai, saying, Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying,***

The twenty first day of the seventh month is four weeks after the enthusiastic beginning of the rebuilding. It is the last day of the feast of the tabernacles. This festival is to celebrate the harvest but at this time the harvest was not very good. The peoples moral is low because of the poor harvest and the additional pressure to work on the temple. Even though not much could have been constructed in the last month it is probably clear this temple would not be a glorious as the first one. (2 Chron. 3:5-10)

The prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel were that the new temple would be better than the old and as far as the people could see there was no way they could build one greater. (Isaiah 60; Ezekiel 40-42)

The word of the Lord, brought through Haggai, was to console and comfort the leaders and people in their depression. It was to bolster their spirits.

***v.2:3 Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?***

Haggai addresses those individuals who has seen the original temple. That temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. it is now 520 B.C., 66 years later. It is very possible for there to be a number of people still alive who, as children, had worshipped in that temple.

In comparing the first temple to this new temple five major things were missing in the new temple; 1) the sacred fire (Lev. 6:9, 13); 2) the shekinah (2 Chron. 5:13-14); 3) the ark and cherubims (2 Chron. 5:7-8); 4) Urim and Thummim (Ex. 28:30); and 5) the spirit of prophecy.

Having these things missing from the temple combined with the outward physical appearance one could see why the new temple did not measure up to the old in their eyes.

***v.2:4 Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts:***

If thought of in comparison to the old temple building the new temple would be a major disappointment to many. Haggai however is bringing encouragement from the Lord. He bring assurances that God is with them regardless of what the temple is made of or what it contains. David's encouragement to Solomon was the same when building the first temple (1 Chron. 28:10, 20)

***v.2:5 According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.***

To give the people confidence Haggai reminds them of the covenant God made with their ancestors when leaving Egypt. (Ex. 19:5-6; 29:45-46) Just as God led the people across the

wilderness, taking care of all their needs, he would again do so as they took of their time to prepare the temple.

Because of the spirit of God was with them they were to proceed without fear. No doubt there were some who felt God would not bless them because of their past sin. There was fear of the Samaritans who were still opposed to the building. There was also fear of their economic situation which was not getting any better.

With the reassurance given by God the people could go about their work without worry or fear. They would have instead a sense of optimism about the future believing God's promises.

***v.2:6 For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;***

Along with the promise to be with them the promise that something greater would come is given. That which is to come will be more than earth shaking for it will shake all of creation. A further interpretation is given by the writer to the Hebrews. (Heb. 12:26-27)

The first covenant was given at Mount Sinai and was accompanied by a great shaking. (Ex. 19:16-19) The establishing of the new covenant would shake the heavens and the earth.

***v.2:7 And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.***

The shaking of the nations has a similar meaning as the shaking of the heavens and earth. There will be an upheaval in the political world as well as the physical. There will be wars and nations will be overthrown. (v.2:22)

Because of a destabilized world the desire of the people will be for something stable to anchor their lives to. The 'desired' would be in the person of Jesus Christ.

There are two thoughts concerning the filling of the temple with glory. One is that God's presence would be in the temple as it was in the first temple. The other is that Christ's physical appearance would be in the temple as he taught and did miracles during his life as a man.

***v.2:8 The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts.***

If the people were looking at glory as being the physical looks of the temple God assures them that all the gold and silver was his. If this had great meaning it could be easily provided for by God. All the wealth of the world was already his and he didn't need the people to provide it. (Ps. 1:10-12)

With this statement he countered all the arguments and excuses the people could make if they claimed it was a waste of time to build the temple because it would not contain the glory of the former one.

***v.2:9 The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.***

After expressing the greatness of God Haggai now counters the conclusions the people may have reached in verse 3. He takes the opposite stance that this temple will not be as nothing but would be greater than the first.

In the material sense the temple Solomon built would never be surpassed although Herod tried. Herod, although not a Jew, used his great wealth to make the temple a glorious sight. Some feel he knew the prophecy and was making an attempt to fulfill the prophecy. Also, knowing the promise of the Messiah, he may have been attempting to divert attention from the promised king to himself and the temple.

Despite his efforts "material magnificence could not replace spiritual glory". The glory of this second temple would be Christ. Jesus himself, the son of God, not veiled in a cloud, but in flesh would make his presence visible in the temple, before everyone, accessible. (Mal. 3:1; John 1:14; Matt. 12:6)

From the temple he spoke to the people. He declared himself to be from God and offered them spiritual peace which could only come from God. (John 14:27; 16:33)

***v.2:10-11 In the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying,***

The third prophecy came two months and three days later. Again it is the Lord speaking through Haggai. (Dec. 18) A couple of weeks prior to this Zechariah began his ministry. (Zech. 1:1)

During the intervening time the people had probably spent sowing the winter crops and collecting materials to be used in the building of the temple.

The message is directed to the priests. It is a matter concerning the law on which they were authorized to teach and interpret. (Lev. 10:10-11; Ez. 44:5,23; Mal. 2:7)

***v.2:12 If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No.***

There are two questions Haggai will ask concerning holy/clean and unholy/unclean. The first question is in reference to the communication of holiness of a holy object to other objects it may touch.

If holy flesh is placed in a garment and the garment touches another piece of food does the other piece of food become holy?

The priests answer the question with a "no". The other piece of food does not become holy. The garment became holy because it came into direct contact with the holy flesh but the holiness could not be communicated beyond direct contact. (Lev. 6:27)

**v.2:13 Then said Haggai, if one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean.**

The second question is similar to the first but concerns the spreading of uncleanness. The question concerns specifically to the touching of a dead body. This was one of the most unclean things to do and required two washings and seven days to become clean again.

If a person comes into contact with a dead body, and thereby becomes unclean, and then touches some food does the food become unclean?

The priests answer correctly, the food does become unclean. Uncleanness is transferable through indirect contact of an unclean object. (Num. 19:11,22)

**v.2:14 Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean.**

In the application of these two laws the altar can be said to represent the garment and the nation of Israel represents the unclean man.

The altar, the first thing built by the people upon returning to Israel, was built on the ground at the site of the first temple. Sacrifices were made on the altar considered to be holy by God. This holy altar was in contact with the ground making the land holy. This holiness however could not be spread to what was built on the land or to what was planted in the land or to what might grow on the land. There are no special blessings attributed to the holy land.

The people on the other hand became unclean by their failure to be obedient and rebuild the temple according to God's will. Because they had become unclean whatever they come into contact with becomes unclean, whether it is their house, crops they sow or even the sacrifices they make.

The possession of something holy does not cover an unclean act. In actuality uncleanness is spread more widely than holiness. "*One drop of filth will defile a vase of water: many drops of water will not purify a vase of filth*" (Prov. 15:8; Titus 1:15)

**v.2:15 And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord:**

The Hebrew word for 'upward' can mean to look backward as well as forward. In this case the meaning is taken to mean backward. As part of the third prophecy the people are asked to reflect backward from this day. Since from this day forward stones were being placed upon one another to build the temple the people are to look back to the time before the temple rebuilding began.

*"Now give careful thought to this from this day on, consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the Lord's temple"* NIV

Based on the two illustrations and the interpretation of their actions given by Haggai in the prior verses what conclusions should the people reach? As they look at their actions through the law are they clean or unclean, holy or unholy?

***v.2:16 Since those days were, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the pressfat for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty.***

Haggai brings up their economic situation over these last years of temple inactivity. He speaks of the harvest and their expectations of the yield of their crop. When the farmer looked out over the fields and when the grain was reaped and placed in a heap to be threshed the expectation was there would be twenty measures. After threshing there was actually only ten measures.

The same occurred at the wine press. The harvest of grapes yielded many bushels and the expectation was fifty vessels of wine. But after the pressing the grapes only twenty vessels were actually filled.

The consequences of their sin stated here are the same as in the first prophecy, (v.1:6, 9) They were expecting much reward for their hard work but because their actions were unclean little benefit came from it.

***v.2:17 I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith the Lord.***

Along with the poor rainfall (v.1:10) the Lord sent other plagues; blasting (corn blight), mildew and hail, as warnings to the people of their continued disobedience. God had issued these warning before but still they had not learned to turn to him. (Deut. 28:22; Amos 4:9) Haggai as with past prophets was sent to spell it out for them.

***v.2:18 Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation was laid, consider it.***

Once again Haggai implores them to look back and make observations on what has transpired since the laying of the foundation approximately 20 years ago. Review your lives and that of your neighbors and friends. Are there any clues which would indicate they were not being blessed? If they were not being blessed what were the reasons?

***v.2:19 Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you.***

To jog their memory Haggai questions them about the intervening time in which no work was done on the temple. During this time was there seed to store in the barn? Were there enough grapes to harvest? How about the figs, or the pomegranates or the olives?

What Haggai is implying is that there were no signs of good crops since the foundation was laid in the second year of Cyrus. There were no blessings being bestowed upon the people or the nation. There must have been a reason for this. By looking at the past he was going

to show the people they were headed in the right direction. The decision had been made to begin the rebuilding and now there would be a change in their lives.

Indeed the promise does come. The promise is that God would bless them from this day forward. Returning to obedience would give God pleasure and he could be glorified. (v.1:8)

***v.2:20 And again the word of the Lord came unto Haggai in the four and twentieth day of the month, saying,***

The fourth and last prophecy of Haggai comes on the same day as the third prophecy.

***v.2:21 Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I will shake the heavens and the earth;***

This prophecy is directed to Zerubbabel as the leader of Israel. Zerubbabel may have had some concern about the nation in light of the prophecy of Haggai about the great shake up of the nations. (v.2:7) The prophecy just given may have been confusing and he may have been asking for a clarification.

Haggai now repeats the second prophecy declaring the shaking of the heavens and the earth. (v.2:6)

***v.2:22 And I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother.***

Speaking to Zerubbabel Haggai expands on the prophecy to explain there will be an overthrowing of nations through military conquests. Kings and kingdoms will fall, military equipment will be used to no avail. All will be destroyed as God remains in control of all things.

In hind sight we can see how power changed and various nations rose and fell. After the Persians came the Greeks under Alexander the Great. Greek language, art and literature spread over the entire middle east. There were battles for power during this period as civil wars broke out through much of the empire. The Maccabean wars erupted as Palestine sought independence. Then the Romans began their conquest and maintained power through the time of Christ.

***v.2:23 In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the Lord, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts.***

As the people awaited the Messiah all the earth shaking events would take place and more. Zerubbabel however is given a promise. He and his descendants would continue to be leaders of Israel. The "*signet*" is the sign of the authority delegated to him by God. Zerubbabel was a descendent of David and in choosing him the covenant with Israel is renewed.

Zerubbabel becomes a type or shadow of Christ. He brings the people back from captivity just as Christ brings believers back from the captivity of sin. God establishes the covenant with him just as Christ establishes the new covenant. Zerubbabel directs the building of the temple, Christ directs his church.

The fulfillment of the promise of the messiah coming through the line of David culminates with Jesus Christ the descendant of Zerubbabel.

So the book of Haggai which began with a rebuke for being disobedient because of not responding to God's will ends with a renewed covenant and a promise of future blessings.

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