

HAGGAI- MESSAGE FOR THE PEOPLE WAKE UP!

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Haggai 1; Ezra 5.

PRINTED TEXT: Haggai 1:1–10, 12–15

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.—Haggai 1:8

BACKGROUND

Solomon began to build the temple around 966 BC. After its completion, it stood for nearly four centuries as the grand religious monument of Solomon's reign.

The temple replaced the tabernacle as Israel's focal point for worship.

The Israelites came to the temple for three annual feasts (Deuteronomy 16:16).

Standing as the symbolic dwelling place of God in the midst of His people, the temple had a fond place in the hearts of pious Israelites.

But a catastrophe befell the temple during the reign of Zedekiah. In 586 BC the Babylonians devastated Jerusalem. The temple was looted and burned (2 Kings 25).

The period that followed is known as *the Babylonian exile*, a time in which large numbers of Jews were deported from Judah to live in Babylon.

See Supplemental

The exile came to an end shortly after Cyrus, king of Persia and Media, conquered Babylon in 539 BC.

In late 539 or early 538 BC, Cyrus issued a decree allowing Jews who so wished to return to Judah and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1–4). About 50,000 went back.

Cyrus was distinguished equally as a statesman and as a soldier. By pursuing a policy of generosity instead of repression, and by favoring local religions, he was able to make his newly conquered subjects into enthusiastic supporters. Due in part to the political infrastructure he created, the Achaemenid Empire endured long after his demise.

See supplement

The Jews who returned from exile were eager to take advantage of Cyrus's decree and rebuild the temple. They succeeded in rebuilding the altar and began once again to conduct sacrifices (Ezra 3:1–6).

They even succeeded in laying the foundations for a new temple (Ezra 3:7–13), but opposition forced a halt (Ezra 4:24).

As a result, the temple proper remained unfinished for the better part of two decades after Jewish exiles had returned with plans to rebuild it.

After this long time of inactivity, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah preached in the year 520 BC about the need to rebuild the temple (Ezra 5:1, 2).

These are the same prophets who wrote the books of the Old Testament that bears their names.

- The book of Zechariah -gives an account of his prophetic encouragement regarding the rebuilding of the temple (see Zechariah 1:16; 4:9).
- The book of Haggai -gives that prophet's perspective on how he preached in this regard and how the people responded to his message.

I. Temple Neglected (Haggai 1:1–4)

A. Context (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 date of Haggai's first prophecy is very specific as to the year, month, and day of Darius's reign.

This particular *Darius* is the third emperor of the Persian Empire; he follows Cyrus and Cambyses to the throne.

Darius reigned from 521 to 486 BC. This Darius is not to be confused with the very different King Darius of the book of Daniel.

Shortly after returning from exile, two leaders emerge.

The first is *Zerubbabel*, the governor, who is *son of Shealtiel* (compare Ezra 3:2, 8; 5:2). Shealtiel himself is the son of King Jehoiachin. We know this from 1 Chronicles 3:17–19.

B. Rationalization (v. 2)

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 plans to rebuild the temple had not gone well for the returned exiles. They had good plans and good intentions to start (Ezra 3:7–13).

But political opposition arose that brought the project to a halt (Ezra 4:1–5, 24).

Haggai is anxious to correct this false conclusion.

Procrastination has been defined as “doing something—anything—except what one should be doing at the time.” As one Web site says, “Procrastination is the grave in which opportunity is buried.” Needless to say, procrastination can be a disruptive tendency.

C. Confrontation (vv. 3, 4)

3, 4. Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?

But most of the returnees are well settled now, a decade and a half after the initial return. **It’s past time to make God’s ruined *house* rather than their own *houses* their priority.** Allowing God’s temple to remain in ruins is a disgrace and an insult to God. Haggai shames them for this.

II. Blessings Forfeited (Haggai 1:5–10)

A. Thinking It Through, Part 1 (vv. 5, 6)

5, 6. Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. 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.

Those who had returned from exile had not prospered materially. Crops of grain for food and grapes for *drink* and flax for clothing had been insufficient to satisfy the needs. Money seemed to disappear, as if leaking from a ripped purse.

Give gas example- why people hold off tithe because economy is bad.

Haggai indicates that this is no coincidence. Rather, this is happening because the people are giving no thought to the status of God’s house.

Apparently, people have been thinking, “Because the economy is bad, we can’t afford to build the temple.” What they should be thinking is, “The reason the economy is bad is because we haven’t built the temple.”

Behind Haggai’s statement is the teaching of Deuteronomy 28. That passage instructs that God will bless His people if they obey Him, but He will curse them if they disobey. The lack of material blessing among those who have returned from exile is thus a consequence of their failure to obey God’s call to rebuild His temple.

B. Thinking It Through, Part 2 (vv. 7–10)

7, 8. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. 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.

The solution to the disobedience is to repent and obey. In this case that means harvesting wood so work on the temple can begin again.

Forests exist in the hill country of Judah in ancient times, but the best wood comes from the mountains of Lebanon. Solomon had imported cedar and other woods for his temple from there (1 Kings 5:6; 7:2; 2 Chronicles 2:8, 16).

The text before us probably implies doing the same for Zerubbabel's temple, since that was the original intent of the returning exiles (Ezra 3:7). Thus the people should *go up to the mountain* in Lebanon to acquire the best wood, as is fitting for God's house. (Alternatively, *mountain* in verse 8 may refer to the temple mount to which wood is to be brought.)

Rebuilding the sacred space of the temple will bring God *pleasure*. Furthermore, the temple will be used to glorify God since it will be a place of worship.

9, 10. Ye looked 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. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.

Because people fail to give attention to God's *house* while they are looking to their own houses, God has decided not to bless them materially. In particular, rains have not come in a timely way, so the crops are meager. But obedience will mean that God will reverse that according to the promises of blessings in Deuteronomy 28.

III. Work Started (Haggai 1:12–15)

A. People's Obedience (v. 12)

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.

In this case, *all the remnant of the people*—that is, those who have returned from exile, led by the governor *Zerubbabel* and the high priest *Joshua*—respond positively and prepare to rebuild the temple. This response is also recorded in Ezra 5:1, 2, which indicates that the prophet Zechariah supports Haggai in encouraging the Jews in this rebuilding

B. Lord's Favor (v. 13)

13. Then spake Haggai the LORD's messenger in the LORD's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD

In response to the people's willingness to build the temple, Haggai conveys God's promise: *I am with you.*

Trials and opposition lie ahead. Even after the rebuilding begins, Persian officials will threaten to stop the project (Ezra 5:3–17). But God will see them through to the project's completion (see Ezra 6:13–15; Zechariah 4:8, 9).

C. Everyone's Work (vv. 14, 15)

14. And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of 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.

Behind the outward act of beginning to rebuild the temple is an inward, invisible movement of God in the spirits of *the people* and their leaders. **God often works through human messengers to stir hearts** (example: Acts 2:37). In this case the prophets Haggai and Zechariah are used by God to compel action (again, Ezra 5:1, 2).

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

The date mentioned here can be calculated to be September 21, 520 BC. Thus the work begins only 23 days after Haggai had begun preaching on the need to rebuild the temple (Haggai 1:1, 2).

In a little over 3 weeks, things start to turn around. God's people begin the task God wishes for them to undertake.

The task will not be easy, since the temple will not be completed until March 12, 515 BC (Ezra 6:15).

But God will be with them during those four and one-half years.

Conclusion

Haggai's purpose was simple and clear. It was to motivate the Jews to build the temple. To do this he also fulfilled a secondary purpose: he confronted the people with their misplaced priorities. They were building their own houses but had neglected God's house. It was important to finish building the temple because only then could the people fully resume Levitical worship as the Lord had specified. They had gone into captivity for covenant unfaithfulness. Thus they needed to return to full obedience to the Mosaic Covenant.

Do we have a mandate? What thing is we supposed to be building for our Lord? What do you think He is telling us through this study?