



# THE MINOR PROPHET CHALLENGE

## *The Prophecy of Haggai*

### INTRODUCTION TO HAGGAI

All introductory material has been excerpted from *The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible* published by Zondervan Publishing. We highly recommend it for your personal study library.

#### Author

The prophet Haggai (his name means “my feast”) worked with the prophet Zechariah to encourage the returning Jewish exiles as they rebuilt the temple (Ezr. 5:1; 6:14). We know nothing about Haggai other than from the prophet’s own book. The book closes with high expectations for Zerubbabel, leaving little doubt that the book was written before the governor’s restoration program failed.

#### Time and Place of Writing

Date: 520 B.C. (Haggai’s Ministry)

As we might expect from our discussion of authorship, the books of Haggai and Zechariah (see “Introduction to Zechariah”) have a common historical background, both prophets having begun their ministries in 520 B.C., in “the second year of King Darius: (1:1; see also Zec. 1:1). The Jews had returned to the promised land under the edict of Cyrus (Ezr. 1:1-4) in 538 B.C. and had begun to rebuild the temple. Opposition from the outside and discouragement from within caused them to abandon the project (Ezr. 4:1-4) for 16 or 17 years. When Haggai and Zechariah began their work in 520 B.C., reissued Cyrus’s edict so that the temple was rebuilt within four years (Ezr. 6:13-15). The second temple was dedicated on March 12, 516 B.C.

As for Haggai’s oracles, we learn from his book that they were delivered between August and December 520 B.C.

#### Purpose

To encourage the reconstruction of the temple in hopes of bringing great blessings to Israel after the exile.

#### Finding Christ in Haggai

The two central themes of this book- the temple and the victory of the Davidic line- find their fulfillment in Christ.

One, rebuilding the temple was crucial for the restoration of the nation to the blessings of God. It was the place of prayer, worship, forgiveness, etc. Christ is the final temple (Jn. 2:21-22), but the church, his body, is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Co. 6:19-20). When Christ returns the new heavens and the new earth will be God’s holy dwelling place (Rev. 21:22-23).

Two, the restoration of David’s line was also an essential part of God’s blessing on the restored community. The Davidic line was to lead the people in battle and secure their prosperity. Jesus is the Messiah, the final and perfect son of David (Mt. 1:1; Lk. 20:41-44; Ro. 1:3). After his death he established his kingdom when he ascended to his throne in heaven (Ac. 1:9-11). He now reigns until all of his enemies are subdued (1 Co. 15:25-27; 1 Pe. 3:22). When he returns he will rule over the heavens and the earth (Heb. 2:8; Rev. 1:5). The church is united with Christ in his enthronement (Ro. 8:37; 1Pe. 5:10), so that one day those who overcome will reign with him.

Date (B.C.)	Haggai	Zechariah
Aug. 29, 520	Haggai's First Message (1:1-11)	
Sept. 21, 520	Rebuilding Temple Resumes (1:12-15)	
Oct. 17, 520	Haggai's Second Message (2:1-9)	
Oct./Nov. 520		Zechariah's Preaching Begins (1:1-6)
Dec. 18, 520	Haggai's Third Message (2:10-19)	
Dec. 18, 520	Haggai's Fourth Message (2:20-23)	
519-518		
Feb. 15, 519		Zechariah's Night Visions (1:7-6:8)
Feb. 519		Joshua Crowned as High Priest (6:9-15)
Dec. 7, 518		Zechariah Calls for Repentance (7:1-8:23)
After 480		Zechariah's Later Prophecies (9:1-14:5)

## IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT HAGGAI

### Hey guys, it's Haggai

A "Feast"? The name may (or may not) have additional significance. The temple was associated with many of the feasts of Israel, and the oracles expressed in this book are given at precisely the times of the year when feasts would be expected.

### Haggai On What Broken People Are Like:

Broken people need reminders. "The word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai," or "The Lord says/declares..." These phrases occur at least 22 times in the 38 verses of this short book. We tend to turn our focus (hearts and minds) away from God and his purposes. Haggai reminds us that God intervenes in our forgetfulness (think of Christ interceding for us—Rom. 8:34)

Broken people get their priorities scrambled. The people of Judah had become caught up in trying to get their world right: paneling their houses becomes a metaphor for seeking comfort, stability and social status before seeking the Kingdom of God.

Broken people don't give 'careful thought' to their ways. The Lord asks the returned exiles to ponder the lack of success they are experiencing. In fact, He asked them four times to reconsider what they were doing. They did not see the connections between the waywardness of their hearts and the emptiness of their efforts.

Broken people are frustrated and confused: "you expected much, but see, it turned out to be little" (1:9). The result of all their efforts is spelled out in the

text. They have experienced drought in its widest sense: they sowed much, but harvested little, not had enough to eat or drink, been cold, and wasted their precious money. When God speaks through Haggai, he does not hold back any of the truth about their needy and nearly despairing situation.

Broken people are discouraged by the present. “Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?” Wow. What a bad trip this return from exile has been—we’ll never measure up to our glorious past! We’ll just have to make do... [Eeyore’s voice here]. Broken people need to be reminded of God’s covenant, established before we were ever born, and his plans for our future.

There is encouragement for broken people. After the Lord got their attention with his first message of explanation, his second message returns to an ancient theme for the people of Israel: “Be strong, all you people...For I am with you” (1:13). It is the exact message given to Joshua when he faced the tough task of leading the people into Canaan. The challenges are similar for Zerubbabel; they are the same for all broken people.

Broken people can be unfit for God’s work. The Lord asks a series of rhetorical questions starting in 2:10, the point of which is to define what it means to be defiled. Haggai drives the Lord’s intent home with his comment: “So it is with this people and this nation in my sight... Whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled.” Disqualified. Unfit for service. Outcasts. Such would seem to be the fate of these people. But God invites them to a second chance.

There is hope for broken people. Since the people of Judah (like all broken people) are unable to live in obedience to God, He reaches to them. “I am with you” is God’s declaration to both the people and to the leaders (1:13, 2:4), and the covenant blessings are assured by his initiative: “from this day on I will bless you... for I have chosen you”(2:19, 23).

Broken people are known by name and called individually by God. God sends Haggai to Zerubbabel (the governor) and to Joshua (the High Priest). He mentions them by name, and provides promises of blessing that are specifically tied to their role in the community, the political success of Judah for Zerubbabel and the restoration of the Temple for the High Priest. These guys didn’t earn this recognition by their good works, but God acts graciously toward their troubled situation.

## Haggai on what God is like:

God is the LORD ALMIGHTY. This phrase (the “Covenant Lord, Yahweh” “...of Hosts—all armies”) occurs more densely in the post-exilic prophets (Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi) more often than in any other part of scripture. The people of God needed to hear (again and again) that God is in control, there is no power equal to or greater than Him. In this book we learn that God “blew away” what the people thought they could provide for themselves (1:9) and promises to “shake the heavens and the earth” (2:6). Our God reigns.

Lord Sabaoth? Has this line in the hymn “A Mighty Fortress is our God” ever stumped you: “Lord Sabaoth his name / from age to age the same / and He must win the battle...” ? Well that ‘Lord Sabaoth’ is the exact transliteration of the expression found here in Haggai (and elsewhere) for the “Lord of Armies/Hosts”. Now we know why “He must win the battle”. Sing on.

God works in hard times. The return from exile was ‘supposed’ to be a time of blessing and ‘easy life’ (cf. the promised transformation of the desert before the exiles in Is. 41). But they didn’t return to an oasis in the desert. Economic hardship, political tension, and fruitless labor better define what Israel was experiencing. The Lord recognizes their hardships, sends his messengers and his Spirit, changes how they react to their circumstances and instills hope in the people.

God asks questions and gives answers. There are places in the Bible where God speaks from the throne of heaven and declares what his people should do (or should have done). Note here that he uses questions to engage his people. It’s not that he doesn’t know the answer or that he seeks to humiliate them by asking the obvious. In Haggai, the questions call his people to connect the dots between what God has said to be true and needed in his Word, and what the people were practicing and experiencing. These questions draw the interlocutor to the speaker, while not failing to draw the truth out of the confusion of their lives.

God works through his community. The call in Haggai is to the leaders of the people. The message is for the people, but God works through his ordained structure. The word of the Lord comes to Zerubbabel (1:1), he responds (1:12), and he and the people are blessed (2:20): “all you people of the land....”

God sets a great future before his people (2:6-9). God recalls his eternal covenant (2:5) and then promises greater glory and peace (2:8-9). The LORD concludes his message with an anaphoric “I will...” that reveals his determination to bless his people and assure their future.

God is a God of completion. The oracles and their human responses in Haggai belie the work of a God who achieves what he proclaims, and makes good on what he promises. In Haggai we see God move his people to the fulfillment of his will: we start with disobedient ignorance, move to response, and end with blessing.

## The Beauty in the Book

1. Haggai displays a clear macro-structure: the requisite stages for a rebuilding project (Mark Boda)
    - a. A call to initiate the project (1:1-15)
    - b. Encouragement to continue the project (2:1-9)
    - c. A celebration of completion (2:10-23)
  2. Haggai Presents A Clean Chronological Progression
    - a. Oracle of August, 520 BC (1:1-15)
    - b. Oracle of October, 520 BC (2:1-9)
    - c. Oracle of December, 520 BC (2:10-23)
  3. That Chiasmus thing again: “Haggai 1: Who says what?”
    - a<sup>1</sup>. These people say the time is not right (to build the Lord’s house) (v. 2)
    - b<sup>1</sup>. Inequities identified: paneled private houses / unrestored house of the Lord (v. 3)
      - c<sup>1</sup>. This is what the Lord Almighty says.. (v. 5-6)
        - d<sup>1</sup>. Give careful thought to your ways
      - c<sup>2</sup>. This is what the Lord Almighty says... (v. 7)
        - d<sup>2</sup>. Go begin the work
    - b<sup>2</sup>. Inequities identified: you do much but have little
  - a<sup>2</sup>. The Lord declares that the times (of harvest) will not be right
4. Yet another outline of Haggai
  - Chap. 1 Neglect of the Lord’s work can have consequences
    - Theme 1: Consider what you do with your resources
    - Theme 2: The Lord moves his people to accomplish his plans
      - Widespread obedience
      - Haggai obeyed as a messenger
      - The Lord stirs up hearts
  - Chap. 2: Appearances can be deceiving: God has great things in store
    - Theme 1: Consider what you see around you, but do not draw the wrong conclusion
    - Theme 2: Future glory will redress the lesser frame
    - Theme 3: Consider the hardships and the judgment, but know that blessing is your future

## 5. Fifteen Weeks of Prophecy = A Semester at HIM\*

- History 101: History of How God Works With Israel.
- Architecture 103: When is it OK to panel?
- Phil. 201 Personal Ethics: Giving Careful Thoughts to Your Ways.
- Interdisciplinary Studies 301: The Effects of Spiritual Life on Agriculture
- Comparative Archeology 201: Temples Then and Now

## WHY IT MATTERS

Questions for your Table / Group

Where is Christ in Haggai? (hint: what longings do we find in this book?)

What are some major Christian doctrines that you find in Haggai?

Questions for personal reflection

Find someone you can connect with: what did your encounter with this book teach you?

Where does the brokenness that appears in this text conform to you own patterns of brokenness? How does the portrait of God given here answer that?

Zerubbabel and Joshua were called to specific roles and given tasks within the community of God's people. Has he given you a role? How can you be faithful to that calling?

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\* Haggai Institute of Missions