

## HAGGAI

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We have to understand the chronology and history of events. Haggai is a prophet who ministered after the fall of Judah to Babylon and who returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonians were defeated by the Medo-Persians.

While dates may differ slightly the chronology appears to be

Fall of Jerusalem	586 BC, some say 587
Babylon falls to the Medo-Persians	539
Cyrus decrees the temple at Jerusalem be rebuilt	538
Allows some Jews to return	536

The work is started, hindered, stopped, restored.

Problems with laws and provocation from enemies and despondency.

Temple completed	516
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We read that in the second year of the reign of Darius on the first day of the sixth month God spoke to Haggai and to Zerubbabel the son of Shaltiel, the governor of Judah and to Joshua the high priest. The message was to rebuild the Temple of the Lord.

Someone closely associated with Haggai was Ezra who led exiles from Babylon back to Judah (Ezra 8 2-14), presumably around 538, where he encouraged the reading of the Torah, the sacred writings, and cleansed the populace of mixed marriages.

A later notable was Nehemiah who was the cup bearer to Artaxerxes, king of Persia. Nehemiah was made governor of Judah from about 444, and dealt with the rebuilding of the city walls around Jerusalem which took 52 days and then he returned to Susa in Persia.

Alec Motyer makes a helpful introduction to this book with this analysis:

1. Two messages on the same day and the ill consequences of leaving the house of the Lord unbuilt (1.1-11). Messages to Joshua and Zerubbabel (1. 1-2), to the people whose neglect of the House of God is the reason for their ills (1'.3-11)
2. The first ' I am with you ' message (1.12-15)
3. The second 'I am with you ' message (1.15- 2.9)
4. Two messages on the same day and the blessings of building a consecrated house (2. 10-23), a blessing to the people who built the house and a blessing to Zerubbabel.

The opening verse is very precise as to date. On the first day of the sixth month in the second year of the reign of Darius, the Lord spoke to Haggai, Joshua and Zerubbabel and the Lord was concerned that the people did not think the time was right to rebuild the Temple. It may have been that they were concerned with their own housing arrangements of the necessary recourses. Perhaps they thought that their accommodation took priority.

Haggai responds and speaks about the people are living in ceiled house when the Temple lies waste and the prophet calls on the people to consider their ways. The people were considering their own needs and ignoring the Temple, worship and, therefore, God Himself.

Before we are tempted to sit in judgment, is it not true that we put ourselves first at every opportunity and often the Lord and spiritual matters are ignored?

The prophet continues in verse 6 by saying that for all their hard work there is little harvest and not enough to drink; there is inadequate clothing with which to keep warm and the wages earned go so quickly, it is like putting your wages into a bag of holes. Clearly a drought is taking place which is affecting the crops and livestock. These difficulties are due to God's displeasure that His House lies waste. Some Jews concerned with the infertility of the land are turning to Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility. That being so, it is no surprise that God is displeased. Many Jews believed in this fertility cult and, in their distress, turned to the cult of Baal.

The key to prosperity centred on loyalty to the Lord. It has been said that when the people shun the Lord then He withholds blessing.

Instructions in verse 8 are given to the location of wood for the building and then when the Temple is built God will be both delighted and glorified. All the peoples looking after other matters has not brought them success and it is down to the Temple still be in ruins.

The dew in the land was essential for the crops but this will be withheld and the produce of fruit will be halted. The people are running back and forth to their own houses and care not for the House of God who has called for the drought as an example to the people that they have their priorities wrong. This must not be taken as God being hateful or vindictive but as a reminder of the people's duty and loyalty to Him. If you consider the manifold blessings the Lord had bestowed upon His people then they should need no reminders of God's goodness to them.

The chapter ends with the people's response to Haggai's preaching. They believed the Lord had sent Haggai and that he was a true prophet and they began to regain their respect for the Lord, Haggai is now referred to as the Lord's messenger and assures the people that the Lord is with His people.

Both Joshua and Zerubbabel have their hearts stirred. They are inspired as are the people and they began the work in the House of the Lord in the 24th day of the sixth month in the second year of Darius the king.

However, the work went slowly and was completed in the sixth year of Darius, four years after the work began (Ezra 6.15).

But the message from the Lord is, I am with you.

Chapter 2 begins with another date when the Lord spoke to Haggai telling him to speak to Joshua, Zerubbabel and the remnant of the people with the question, Who of you remember the Temple in all its glory? Look at it now. How do you compare it?

Then comes the second I am with you (2.4). Then the Lord makes reference to the exodus and how the Lord kept His word to His people and exhorted them to fear not.

The reference to the exodus was relevant since the date of the annual feast of tabernacles took part in the seventh month as did this announcement in the second chapter of Haggai.

The Sinai Covenant was a conditional one and set out the commandments that Israel had to keep and,

if that was so, God promised that He would be with them. Part of the covenant was that God would be with His people and bless them.

As an aside, it is interesting to note that many atheists and agnostics including some famous figures had readily admitted that the ten commandments is the best code of moral conduct ever produced.

From verse 6, God says that in a little while God will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land and shake all nations and the desire of all nations shall come. A little while seems a strange comment when this prophecy seems to refer to aspects of the Second Coming of Christ when there will be wonders in the heavens and the earth and all nations shall come to Jerusalem to be judged of the Lord Jesus at the start of His millennial reign. Then the Lord will fill this house, namely the Temple, with glory gives credence to the belief that a Temple will be built in Jerusalem in a day to come.

The expression a little while may be more understood when we read the a thousand years to us with the Lord is like one day.

All the wealth including gold and silver is the Lord's. He speaks about the Temple now being built as to be greater than the original built by Solomon and there is introduced the element of peace but this second temple was not always a place of peace. The Temple to be later built in Jerusalem will be occupied by the Prince of Peace during His thousand year reign.

There will be those who will disagree with this exposition but it does make sense and where the Lord reigns there will be peace.

I have heard this passage interpreted as the prosperity in the time of the second Temple and the riches that were pouring into Jerusalem which filled the Temple with glory. The glory of Solomon's Temple was well-known but the second Temple would have a glory all its own. I have also heard that Herod's Temple enjoyed glory for the Lord Jesus visited it.

Verses 10 to 14 present some problems. Haggai does not tell us what unclean offerings are being made but there is a distinction between the sacred and the profane and the clean and the unclean. What is profane and unclean is defilement.

There has to be cleansing before renewal. The 'holy flesh ' was the part to be sacrificed to the Lord and was often carried in the robe of the priest. Did that make the robe itself holy and if the holy flesh touched other food did that make the other food holy as well? The priests answered no since such holiness cannot be transferred.

The second question Haggai asked of the priests was, if someone was made unclean by touching a dead body and touched any other things do these things become unclean? The answer would be yes and so the Israelites would be deemed to be unclean (Leviticus 11.28, 22. 4-7). Moral cleanliness cannot be transferred but moral uncleanness can.

This was part of Mosaic Law and was important for its time, whereas in our time it may not be relevant. The message is that the Jews were holy and set apart for the Lord (Exodus 19.6) but the nation was now defiled and everything it touched was unclean. The Lord had called Judah my people but now calls them this people. God was displeased with Judah for their disobedience by not putting the building of the Temple as a priority and, therefore, Judah was ceremonially unclean.

It is sadly true that there are Christians serving the Lord with unclean hands and hearts. It is not for us to give examples here but there are false doctrines being perpetrated and some are making money out of their preaching and ministry. Having said that, we must all look to ourselves to ensure that we are serving the Lord for no earthly gain but solely to honour the Lord Jesus. Many are so concerned with

speaking of their own experiences and what has happened to them and what they have done. We should again remind ourselves of that great hymn

O Jesus Christ grow Thou in me  
And all things else recede  
My heart be daily nearer Thee  
From sin be daily freed.

In chapter 2.14, Haggai recognises that Judah is unclean as is their work and offerings because of their procrastination and he exhorts the people to consider their ways even before the first stone of the temple is laid. The wheat crop which should have produced twenty measures at harvest only produced ten measures and the wine should have produced 50 vessels of wine but it only produced twenty. What is there in the barn? (v 19). The drought had affected the harvest.

The people had turned to the Lord but were still enduring the drought. The Lord had smitten the land with the blight of scorching wind and with mildew and with hail (v 17) at a time when the people had not turned to Him. This is the same message as in Amos 4.6, 8-11.

Life is full of changing points for Christians and we have to make decisions and if they are based on putting self first they are not in accordance with God's will and life may be full of problems until the believer considers their ways and returns to the Lord. Often what we do seems right and honourable but it may not be the Lord's will, however good our motive is. How often do we have to consider our ways and reflect on our Christian life? Sometimes we may take on a person with a problem thinking we can help and becoming embroiled in difficulties beyond our ability.

For the people of Judah, God now promises blessings. Obedience to the Lord always produces blessings. The heavens and the earth will be shaken. The nations that have been hostile to the Jews will be overthrown as the Lord announced to Zerubbabel (verses 21ff). The reference to the signet ring suggests kingship and whether Zerubbabel wanted to be a king we do not know but God blessed him.

What is obvious is that Haggai's preaching was effective and it was because it was based entirely on what the will of God was and the honour given to Him. Preaching and ministry today and, indeed, worship should concentrate exclusively on the Lord Jesus.

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