

# Haggai

## I. Post-Exilic Prophets

### A. Time of political upheaval

1. Judah fell to Babylon in 586 B.C.
2. Babylon was overthrown by Medo-Persia (Cyrus the Great) in 539 B.C.
3. Egypt was conquered by the Persians in 525 B.C. Greece was struggling to overcome Persian invasion. Toward the end of this period Persia was beginning to struggle.

### B. The fall of Babylon

1. During the last years of his 47 year reign, Nebuchadnezzar devoted his attention to building projects around Babylon.
  - a. He was succeeded by his son, Amel-Marduk (biblically known as Evil-Merodach) in 562 B.C. He was followed by Neriglissar (560-555 B.C.), Labishi-Marduk (556 B.C.) and Nabonidus (556-539 B.C.).
  - b. Nabonidus was more interested in archaeology than in governing the empire. His son Belshazzar was “substitute king.” Babylonian sources indicate he was always second in command.
  - c. In 550 B.C. Cyrus revolted against his overlord Astyages the Mede. He conquered Ecbatana in the same year. By 546 B.C. Cyrus had pushed his conquests to Lydia in Asia Minor. In 539 B.C. he determined to challenge Babylon for the rule of the world.
2. According to Daniel 5, Belshazzar was engaged in a desperate attempt to regain the favor of Babylon’s gods (supposedly neglected by Nabonidus) as Cyrus approached the capital.
  - a. How Cyrus gained access to the city is not known for sure. Herodotus and Xophonon (Greek historians) indicate that his troops diverted the Euphrates River which ran through the city.
  - b. Persian troops then waded through the river gates, surprising the defenders within. The cuneiform sources, however, declare that the Babylonians opened the gates of the city to welcome Cyrus as one

liberating the Babylonians from the hated Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar.

#### C. The Edict of Cyrus (539-530 B.C.)

1. During his 10 year reign Cyrus built a reputation as a great liberator. He permitted all people who had been held captive by the Assyrians and Babylonians to return to their native land. The Jews benefitted from this policy. The edict allowing them to return to their native land is recorded in Scripture in two versions:
  - a. The official Aramaic form (Ezra 6:3-5)
  - b. Hebrew version (Ezra 1:2-4)
2. Under Zerubbabel's leadership a group of about 50,000 Jews returned in 536 B.C. Many chose to remain in Babylon as they had become prosperous businessmen while in exile. Only the most spiritual and the most committed desired to return to Palestine and rebuild the nation and the temple.
3. The Cyrus Cylinder is a great archaeological discovery providing historical insight and support of the biblical record. This cylinder was baked clay and was about 9 inches long and is currently in the British Museum. It contains an account of the destruction of Babylon and of his policy of allowing captives to return to their native land and to rebuild their ancestral temples.
4. The first order of business was the rebuilding of the altar on the site of the ruined temple in Jerusalem. As soon as they settled into their homes the foundation of the temple was prepared. Materials were gathered for the rebuilding of the temple, but difficulties soon began. The builders became discouraged and the work ceased. Not a single stone was laid for a period of some 15 years.

#### D. The work of Darius the Great (522-486 B.C.)

1. Cambyses succeeded his father Cyrus as the ruler of the Persian Empire. He is not mentioned in the Bible, probably because nothing of consequence regarding occurred during his reign. He died while on a campaign in Egypt in 522 B.C. Darius, one of his generals, claimed the throne.
2. From 522-520 B.C. Darius was involved in crushing revolts against his rule in various parts of the empire.
3. In 520 B.C. God raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. In August of 520 B.C. Haggai preached a blistering sermon in which he challenged the people of Judah to rebuild the temple. The work resumed immediately. Haggai delivered two more sermons and Zechariah delivered his first by 520 B.C.

#### E. The reign of Xerxes (485-465 B.C.)

1. Darius' death triggered new rebellions, especially in Babylon and Egypt. When Xerxes was finally able to consolidate his power he determined to expand his kingdom into Europe. An assembly was called to plan the invasion of Greece.
2. In 480 B.C. the expedition to Greece was undertaken. Xerxes was soundly defeated in a sea battle at Salamis and in land battles at Thermopylae and Plataea. He then retreated to Shushan (Susa) to rebuild his forces.
  - a. Xerxes' advisors believed that he needed a diversion and suggested a new queen be selected to replace Vashti, who had been deported prior to the attacks in Greece when she refused to obey Xerxes.
  - b. In 478 B.C., after a long search, Esther was selected as Xerxes' queen. Some five years later, due to her influence, a plot to exterminate the Jewish people was foiled.
3. In 466 B.C. Xerxes made one last attempt to invade Greece. This attempt was even more disastrous than the first. Xerxes was assassinated the following year.

#### F. The reign of Artaxerxes (465-424 B.C.)

1. In his 7<sup>th</sup> year he commissioned Ezra to be the "secretary of state of Jewish affairs" in the region west of the Euphrates. He was given authority to enforce the law of God among his people, even to the extent of executing those who resisted him.
2. After a journey of some 4 months Ezra and a group of returnees arrived in Judea in 457 B.C. Ezra discovered that many of the leading Jewish men had cast aside their wives and married heathen women. A system was put into place to investigate and resolve these cases of religious intermarriage.
3. Apparently Ezra also attempted to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Ezra 4:11-23). This was not a part of his commission and he failed. Under pressure from his people, Artaxerxes ordered that the work cease until further notice.
4. Thirteen years later Nehemiah became governor of Judea. He had royal permission to rebuild the city. In spite of opposition the walls were rebuilt in 52 days. Jerusalem was then repopulated to further protect her from her enemies. Nehemiah instituted reform to bring the postexilic community into compliance with God's law.
5. After 12 years Nehemiah returned to the Persian court, perhaps to have his commission as governor renewed. It is thought that Malachi's work was assigned to the time of his absence.

6. About 420 B.C. Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. He dealt decisively with the problem of Sabbath abuse and intermarriage with heathens. In his absence Tobiah, the Ammonite leader who has so bitterly opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem, had been assigned to the temple courts and had taken up residence there when visiting the city. Nehemiah threw him out of the chambers. Old Testament history closes with a dramatic effort by Nehemiah to purge Jerusalem of the corrupting influences of non-believers.

## II. The Prophet Haggai

### A. The Man

Note: Haggai has been referred to by some as “the goad of God.” This is based on his being used by God to provoke the people to action in rebuilding the temple.

1. Haggai means “the joyous one” or “festive one”. The name suggests that he may have been born on one of the great O.T. holy days.
2. No other person in the Bible bears his name, but it has surfaced on various tablets and papyri from the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.
3. Not much is known about him. There is no reference made to his family or direct claims as to his hometown. From 2:3 some have inferred that he saw the first temple. This would mean that, in 520 B.C., he would have been about 80 years old. Jewish tradition holds that he spent most of his life in Babylon.
4. Early Christian tradition considered him to be of priestly lineage. According to 2:10-14 it can be said that he knew the finer points of ceremonial law. He was also knowledgeable about political events and agriculture.
5. Tradition connects Haggai with the book of Psalms. His name appears in the headings of several psalms in the ancient versions:
  - a. Latin Vulgate – Psa. 111, 145
  - b. Syriac Peshitta – Psa. 125, 126, 137, 145-148
  - c. Septuagint – Psa. 137, 145-148

Note: It is thought that he may have arranged these psalms for worship.

6. Later tradition regards Haggai as one of the founders of the Great Synagogue.

### B. The Mission

1. His ministry lasted only about 4 months, from late August to mid-December of 520 B.C. He had a one track mind: rebuild the temple!

2. For 15 years there had been no work on the temple (after being begun by Zerubbabel). The community leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest, were discouraged.
3. Under the preaching of Haggai and his younger contemporary Zechariah (Ezra 5:1; 6:14) God stirred the hearts of the postexilic community. It is said that in 4 months he accomplished more than any other prophet.

### C. The Message

1. Haggai contains only 38 verses, second only to Obadiah in its brevity. The book contains four sermons delivered on three different occasions.
2. These sermons are precisely dated in terms of the year, month and day of the reign of Darius the Great.
3. Structure:

The Structure of Haggai			
A Call to Action	A Call to Courage	A Call to Patience	A Call to Hope
Reproof	Encouragement	Blessing	Promises
Ch. 1	2:1-9	2:10-19	2:20-23

4. Several phrases are used repetitively to emphasize Haggai's claims of inspiration:
  - a. "the word of Yahweh" (5 times)
  - b. "thus says Yahweh" (5 times)
  - c. "oracles of Yahweh" (11 times)
5. The strongest claim to inspiration is made in 1:3.
6. The key exhortation in the book is "consider your ways." This appears twice in its complete form (1:5,7) and three additional times in an abbreviated form (2:15,18). The use of the imperative "be strong" (3 times in 2:4) should also be noted.
7. Haggai is less poetic than his prophetic predecessors. Yet, he uses parallelism frequently. His favorite device is the rhetorical question (used five times).
8. Approximately 40% of the book is predictive:
  - a. Shaking of the present order to usher in the kingdom of Christ (2:6-7, 21-22)
  - b. the coming of the Desire of the Nations (2:7)

- c. the greater glory of the temple in the messianic age (2:9)
- d. elevation of Zerubbabel (one of his descendants) to authority in the messianic age (2:23)
- e. only the first is cited and explained in the NT (Heb. 12:26-27)

9. Moral conduct is not addressed at all. His focus was on the temple.

# Haggai

## Outline

### I. A Call to Action (1:1-15)

#### A. The Preface (1:1)

1. The date of the oracle (vs. 1a)
2. The credentials of the speaker (vs. 1b)
3. The recipients of the oracle (vs. 1c)

#### B. Reproof for Neglecting God's House (1:2-6)

1. The reason for neglect (vs. 2-4)
2. The result of neglect (vs. 5-6)

#### C. Exhortation to Build God's House (1:7-11)

1. The appeal presented (vs. 7-8a)
2. The appeal reinforced positively (vs. 8b)
3. The appeal reinforced negatively (vs. 9-11)

#### D. Response in Building God's House (1:12-15)

1. Work resumed in the right spirit (vs. 12)
2. Work resumed with blessing (vs. 13-14a)
3. Work resumed with haste (vs. 14b-15)

### II. The Great Shaking (2:1-23)

#### A. A Call to Courage: Haggai's Second Oracle (2:1-5)

1. Present discouragement (vs. 1-3)
2. Encouragement to steadfastness (vs. 4)
3. Encouragement to fearlessness (vs. 5)

#### B. Revelation of Future Glory (2:6-9)

1. Preparation for the Messianic Age (vs. 6-7a)
2. The Coming Messiah (vs. 7b)
3. Result of the Messiah's Coming (vs. 7c-9)

#### C. A Call to Patience: Haggai's Third Oracle (2:10-19)

1. The nature of defilement (vs. 10-13)

2. The fact of defilement (vs. 14)
3. The cause of defilement (vs. 15-17)
4. Promises of renewed prosperity (vs. 18-19)

D. A Call to Hope: Haggai's Fourth Oracle (2:20-23)

1. World kingdoms shaken (vs. 20-22)
2. God's kingdom unshaken (vs. 23)