

Haggai

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Haggai is the tenth of the twelve Minor Prophets. His prophecy is *the word of the Lord that came through the prophet Haggai* and calls for the exiles who had returned from Babylon to be builders of God's house.

Author Haggai, who was both a prophet and a preacher. Along with Zechariah, Haggai *prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them.* (Ezra 5:1,2; 6:14).

Date Haggai prophesied sometime after 520 BC, when the Jews had returned to Israel after their 70 years of exile in Babylon. This means he was a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Background While the Jews were in captivity in Babylon much destruction took place, including the destruction of Solomon's temple in 587 BC. The last three books of the Old Testament (Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi) and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah deal with the rebuilding of the nation after this destruction.

Haggai brought four messages from God to specific individuals. The first was to Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest (1:1). The second was to Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant of the people (2:2). The third was a word to the priests (2:11). The final message was for Zerubbabel (2:21). They were all to *give careful thought* to their ways, lose their indifference, and focus their efforts on building God's house

Message Haggai challenges our spiritual indifference and calls us to focus on God's agenda, not our own. It's easy to think that we prosper because of our own efforts, but Haggai reminds us God's blessings come from being involved in the fulfilment of His plans, not ours. God is merciful with us but every now and then we need to be reminded that He is Lord, and that meaning in life comes from fulfilling God's purposes for our lives. God is building His house and *the glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house.*

Outline

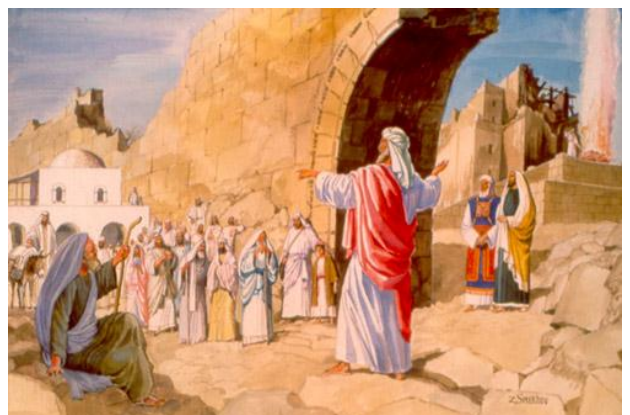
Build the house of the Lord. 1:1-15.

Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah, and Joshua was the high priest. Haggai addresses his first message to these leaders. The people were saying *the time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built.* Haggai challenges this indifference to the work of the Lord by asking them to *give careful thought* to their ways. They were all busy with their own houses, yet they were not prospering because God had removed His blessing from them. The house of the Lord was in ruins so the people were told to get their priorities right: *build the house* so that God could *take pleasure in it and be honoured.*

Zerubbabel and Joshua *obeyed the voice of the Lord,* and the people *feared the Lord.* Haggai encouraged the people by saying the Lord was now with them, and all the people came and began work on the house of the Lord.

The glory of the new house of God. 2:1-9.

About a month later Haggai brought his second message, this time to Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant of the people. He reminded them of the *former glory* of His house and encouraged them *to be strong* because He was with them. They were not to *fear* because God's Spirit remained with them.



To encourage the people further, God then revealed the future glory of His house. He would shake up the earth and *the desired of all nations* would come (Jesus) and God would fill His house *with glory*. *The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house*, and in it there would be peace. When Jesus comes God will bring in a new order that far exceeds anything seen in either the Old or New Testament. See Revelation 21:22-27.

Blessings for God's people. 2:10-19

About two months later Haggai received his third message from God, this time for the priests. They were to give *careful thought* to one aspect of the Law. Something unclean can easily defile anything it touches, but something clean cannot consecrate whatever it touches. Leviticus 6:24-30, Leviticus 22:4-6; Numbers 19:11. *So it is with this people and this nation in my sight. Whatever they do and whatever they offer* in the ruined temple is *defiled*. The offerings brought in the past had not led to blessing because the people did not turn to the Lord, but *from this day on* God promises to bless them. Disobedience to God always has negative consequences. Obedience, on the other hand, leads to blessing!

Shaking of the heavens and the earth. 2:20-23.

The final message is for Zerubbabel. God is going to *shake the heavens and the earth*. He will *overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of foreign kingdoms*. See Revelation 11:15-18. On that day Zerubbabel will be like God's *signet ring*, because God had chosen him.

This was a confirmation to Zerubbabel that God was still working out His promises for the nation of Israel, regardless of the 70 year captivity in Babylon. God knew what He was doing! Messiah was still coming and God was still going to bring about His purpose of a new kingdom where He was truly honoured as Lord.

The temple rebuilding was completed in 516 BC. Having the temple operating in Jerusalem once again showed all of the surrounding nations that the God of Israel was still alive and was continuing to work out His purposes.

God raised Haggai up as voice to His people when they became indifferent to spiritual things and were more interested in their own lives than in building His house.

Today we are God's house! Hebrews 3:6; Ephesians 2:19-22. God wants to dwell in us by His Spirit and work through us to bring glory to His name. This still requires God's people to be committed to fulfilling His purposes and not be side-tracked by their own interests and agendas. 1 Peter 2:1-8.

Only then will we fulfil our calling:

You are a chosen people, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. 1 Peter 2:9.

Discussion questions

What is *the house of the Lord*? Does God live in a house? Does He need a house? What will "the house of the Lord" be like after Jesus returns?

How would the term "house of the Lord" be understood in Haggai's day? How is it understood today?

What is involved in "building your own house?" What is involved in "building God's house?"

Why was it important that God's house be rebuilt in Haggai's day? Why is it important to be involved in building God's house today?

What does Haggai teach us about spiritual indifference, and about priorities?

What have you learned from your study of Haggai? How will you apply this in your life?