

Haggai

Obedience, Rebuilding, and Restoration

We know little about the author apart from this book (1:1; cf. Ezra 5:1; 6:14; Zech 8:9). Haggai dates each of his four prophecies precisely (1:1, 15; 2:1, 10, 20), allowing us to know that they were given between the end of August and the middle of December 520 B.C. The people had returned from Babylon under Ezra's leadership in 536 B.C. and begun the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 1:5). Following the ceremonial laying of the foundation (Ezra 3:8–11), opposition to the rebuilding efforts were raised by the Samaritans (Ezra 4:1–3) and the building came to a complete standstill. The people had returned to their daily lives and begun building their own houses (Ezra 4:4–5, 23–24; Hag 1:4). Haggai, speaking for the Lord, commanded the people to begin rebuilding the Temple (Ezra 5:1). The people responded obediently to God's Word, and the Temple was dedicated in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:15–18).

Prophecy #1 (1:1–15)

“Consider your ways• I am with you”

Prophecy #2 (2:1–9)

“Be strong• I will shake the nations”

Prophecy #3 (2:10–19)

“Consider your ways• I will bless you”

Prophecy #4 (2:20–23)

“Zerubbabel, I have chosen you”

“I Am With You”

Haggai 1:1–15

Although the people had returned sixteen years earlier to rebuild the temple, they had since tired of the work (1:2).

Consider Your Ways

God, through Haggai, calls the people to consider their ways (1:3–5). God’s “house,” the Temple, was basically a roofless skeleton while the people lived in finished houses. Because of this disobedience, God had caused all of their efforts to come to nothing (1:6). A second time God calls the people to consider their ways (1:7) and to finish rebuilding the Temple for his pleasure and glory (1:8). The people’s crops have failed because God was punishing them for their lack of obedience (1:9–11). One must keep in mind the significance of the Temple to the Old Testament believer. The entire system of worship, including the sacrifices and the priesthood, centered in the Temple. Therefore, the people’s failure to complete the Temple was more than just postponing a building project. Rather, it was a rebellion against God and a rejection of divinely inspired worship. In essence, the failure to build was saying, “God, my personal comfort and lifestyle are more important than worshiping and obeying You.”

**Worshiping and obeying
God ought to be of
highest importance.**

I Am With You

The result of God’s reminder to the people was obedience. The people feared God (1:12). God stirred the hearts of the governor Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest to lead the people in obedience (1:12–15).

**God’s presence in his people
will be marked by obedience.**

To Think About

Haggai

What would it have felt like to be one of the returning exiles? How confident would you be in God’s promises? How likely would you be to want to worship him? Why?

Twice God told the Israelites in the first message to “consider their ways.” If we were to stop and consider our ways, what actions or attitudes might we thank God for working into our lives? What actions or attitudes might cause us to be ashamed?

The Temple was central to Israel’s worship of God. What things are essential for us to worship God today?

How important is it to you to worship God? What things get in the way of your worship?

“I Will Shake the Nations”

Haggai 2:1–9

Haggai’s second prophecy came about four weeks after the first (1:1–15). During this period of time, the people had begun to build, a difficult and arduous task. Since the building project had lain dormant for sixteen years, there was no doubt much clearing of rubble and site preparation to do. This would have put a damper on the people’s initial enthusiasm.

Be Strong, I Am With You

Construction would have been delayed because the people were forbidden to work on the Sabbaths as well as the many feast days during the seventh month. No work could be done on the weekly Sabbaths, the first day of the seventh month, the tenth day (the Day of Atonement), nor during the Feast of Tabernacles (the fifteenth through the twenty-first days). In those four weeks or so, there would have been thirteen days on which they could not work. You can imagine the frustration of trying to serve the Lord by building his Temple but being unable to work almost half of the time because of divinely instituted feast and rest days. The temple that was replacing Solomon’s temple was greatly inferior in beauty and size (2:2–3). So God addresses the leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, as well as the people and encourages them to be strong and work because God would be with them as He had promised the nation of Israel when they came out of Egypt (2:4–5).

God is not hampered by our weakness.

Fear Not, I Will Shake the Nations

The people are small in number, have few material resources, and are discouraged. Yet God promises to shake the heavens and the earth and even all the nations of the earth so that the nations will contribute to the building of God’s Temple (2:6–7; cf. 2:21). All of the wealth of the world belongs to God (2:8), and he will bless and glorify his Temple (2:9). While this encouragement refers specifically to the millennial temple that is yet to be built, the reminder of God’s special blessing on his Temple encouraged the people as they built.

The name of the city will be “The LORD Is There.”

To Think About

Haggai

Can you identify with the Israelites’ frustration in trying to build God’s temple but being hindered by God’s Sabbath days and holy days? Are there situations in your life that feel like it is especially difficult to obey God?

When God says he will “shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land,” he is making a declaration of his sovereignty. What effect does God’s sovereignty have on our discouragement or frustration? Our disobedience? Our complaining?

“I Will Bless You”

Haggai 2:10–23

Not only will God bless his Temple, he will also bless his people, whom he punished by allowing them to be taken captive into Babylon. God has not forgotten his people.

Consider Your Ways; I Will Bless You

God uses an illustration from the Law (2:10–11): consecrated meat left over from a sacrifice could not transmit holiness to other objects (2:12), but defilement from touching a dead carcass could be transmitted (2:13). In the same way, the people were defiled by their sinfulness and even their sacrifices were defiled and therefore completely unpleasing to God (2:14). Furthermore, God’s hand was against them, sending them famine and drought and destroying their crops because they had failed to complete the building of God’s Temple (2:15–18). However, because of their obedience, God would once again bless them, both materially and spiritually (2:19).

God is always faithful to his promises.

Zerubbabel, I Have Chosen You

God had promised David that his descendants would rule the nation of Israel forever (2 Sam 7:12–16). If they sinned, God would punish them, but he would not abandon them forever. However, in Jeremiah 22:24–30, God compared Jehoiachin (also called Coniah), the final evil king of Judah, to a signet ring, a symbol of ruling power. God said he would tear Jehoiachin off his hand and give him to the Babylonians. In this final prophecy, God addresses Zerubbabel, the grandson of Jehoiachin and governor of the people (although never called king), and says that once again he plans to shake the heavens and the earth and overthrow the nations of the world (2:20–22). God will set Israel over the nations and his Davidic King over the whole world. He says that Zerubbabel is again like a signet ring to him, reaffirming that he has not abandoned his covenant with David and looking forward to the eternal ruler, the ultimate Son of David (2:23).

God will one day shake the nations, rebuild his temple, and establish his Davidic King as the ruler of the entire world.

To Think About

Haggai

It looked like God had abandoned his promise to David that one of his descendants would reign forever. Look at Matthew 1:12–16 and see how Jesus the Messiah is the descendent of David (v. 6) and of Zerubbabel. How many “greats” great-grandfather was Zerubbabel in relation to Jesus the Messiah?

What does this tell us about God’s promises? What is one of God’s promises to you that you are especially thankful for today? Why?