

HAGGAI

The name Haggai is taken from the Hebrew word *Hag* for “festival.” Perhaps that is appropriate, for there is something festive about the message of this book. It is a call to worship and a call to action, but it is also a call to celebrate the Lord and His presence.

DATE OF WRITING

Haggai is one of the post-exilic prophets. His book contains three discourses, all of which were written during the second year of Darius the Great. Darius was the third of the rulers of the Medo-Persia Empire. What Cyrus the Great had won and what his son Cambyses had extended, Darius took and secured and administered.

King	Dates	Biblical References
Cyrus the Great	550-530 B.C.	2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-8; Daniel 1:21
Cambyses	530-522 B.C.	Not mentioned in Scripture
Darius the Great	522-486 B.C.	Ezra 4-6; Daniel 9:1; 11:1
Xerxes	486-465 B.C.	Ahasueras of Esther
Artaxerxes	465-424 B.C.	Ezra 7; Nehemiah 2:1

HISTORICAL SETTING

Haggai is one of the post-exilic prophets. That means he prophesied after the return from the Babylonian Captivity. He prophesied in that period when the people of God who had been forcibly removed from the promised land had not been allowed to return and rebuild.

Not all had come back. It was a bit like what might happen if the present political situation were to change in Cuba and it was to become a free country. Permission would be given for any and all of Cuban descent to return, but how many would really uproot and return to such a desolated and poverty stricken land?

In the same way, the majority of Jews had elected to remain in the foreign lands to which they had been scattered, but there were some who DID go back. They went to a desolated and poverty stricken land and they began to rebuild their homes and to rebuild their temple.

But then arose opposition. It came through political channels and it came in the form of a royal edict ordering the halting of the reconstruction of the temple. The work stopped and the temple stood abandoned and unfinished.

Life went on.

A year passed.

Then another.

Ten years came and went.

Life was tough and the people focused on eeking out a living.

Then God spoke. He spoke through two prophets -- two witnesses to the Word and Message of God.

*When the prophets, **Haggai** the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them, 2 then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them supporting them. (Ezra 5:1-2).*

The book of Haggai can be divided into three sections. Each of these three sections begins with a question and in each case, the question introduces a sermon that is given to answer the question.

1:1-15	2:1-9	2:10-19	2:20-23
First Sermon	Second Sermon	Third Sermon	Closing words to Zerubbabel
People’s Work Prominent	God’s Work Prominent		
Question: How do we live in luxury when the temple is in ruins?	Question: How does this Temple compare with the former?	Question: Does the Unclean produce that which is Clean?	
Problem: People reluctant to restore covenant fellowship	Problem: People unconvinced of restoration possibilities	Problem: People unfit to take part in restoration	Zerubbabel as symbol of the people
Charge to begin Building	Encouragement to Finish		

These three sermons comprise a call to action. The action involves the completion of the

work of the rebuilding of the Temple.

FIRST SERMON - DEVELOPING A KINGDOM PRIORITY

Priorities are important. They help us to determine what we need to do and when we need to do it. There is nothing so useless as doing well that which does not have to be done at all.

First Sermon 1:1-15		
Question:	Twofold Response:	
Is it time for you to dwell in paneled homes while the House of the Lord is desolate?	The people showed reverence for the Lord.	They came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God

Twice in this section Haggai calls for the people to *consider your ways* -- literally, "Set your heart" (1:5; 1:7).

1. The people had a problem with priorities: *Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?* (1:4).

It is easy to understand how they could fall into this sort of thinking. We do it all the time. That means Haggai's message can be applied to us today. Where are your priorities? Is the building of the Lord's house and the Lord's kingdom first place in your life?

The story is told of a teacher who was speaking to a group of business students. As he stood in front of the group, he pulled out a one-gallon jar and set it on the table in front of him. He also produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar. When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, "Is this jar full?"

Everyone in the class yelled, "Yes." The teacher replied, "Really?" He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. He dumped some gravel in and shook the jar causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks. He then asked the group once more, "Is the jar full?"

By this time the class was on to him. "Probably not," one of them answered. "Good!" he replied. He reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in the jar and it went into all of the spaces left

between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question, "Is this jar full?"

"No!" the class shouted. Once again he said, "Good." Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim.

Then he looked at the class and asked, "What is the point of this illustration?" One eager beaver raised his hand and said, "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard you can always fit some more things in it!"

"No," the speaker replied, "that's not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is: If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all."

It is a good story, but it still misses the point. Developing priorities must begin with recognizing that there is ONE real priority. If the BIG rock in your life is not the One who is THE Rock, then you have bought into an imbalanced sense of priorities and your life will not be what it should.

2. The people were experiencing a dissatisfaction: *You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes (1:6).*

There is a corollary between what you give to God and what you enjoy from God. When John Rockefeller was asked how much money he needed to be happy, his reply was, "Just a little bit more." The quest for happiness through the obtaining of wealth is a vain effort. Someone said, "I know that money cannot buy happiness, but I would not mind being miserable in style." However, misery is miserable, no matter how much money one has.

When I say that there is a corollary between what you give to God and what you enjoy from God, I am not speaking only of the giving of money, though this also applies to how you utilize money. There are many different ways you can give to the Lord and I have found that the Lord will press you on exactly that point where you want to hold back from Him. Why is that? It is because the Lord wants you to enjoy Him to the fullest.

God is most pleased with you when you are most pleased in Him. He wants you to enjoy Him to the uttermost. One of the means of accomplishing that is when you give of yourself to Him.

3. The people were more concerned with their own comforts than with the glory of the Lord: *"Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may*

be pleased with it and be glorified,” says the LORD (1:8).

What you do with your resources is a reflection of your concern with God’s glory. I didn’t say that; Jesus did. He said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21).

This is a call to get out of your comfort zone and into God’s worship zone. I say it that way because the two are mutually exclusive. By contrast, man’s natural tendency is to sit down and stay seated. We gravitate by nature to that which is comfortable. To put it another way, we tend to avoid the extremes of hot or cold and to move to the lukewarm.

What is the answer to such a situation? It is given in verse 12. It is the fear of the Lord: *And the people showed reverence for the LORD (1:12b).*

How do you get that kind of reverence for the Lord? You get it by first repenting and confessing that you do not have it and then by asking God to give it to you. And then there is one more step. You show the reverence that you want to have.

Jesus gave this same formula in Revelation 2:4-5 when He spoke to the church that had left their first love. He said...

- Remember therefore from where you have fallen.
- Repent
- Do the deeds you did at first

That is not the same as pretending. I am not talking about an act of hypocrisy. I am talking about repenting and telling God about your lack of faith and your lack of love and then stepping out in an act of faith and love as you look for the Lord to give you on the inside what you are doing on the outside.

SECOND SERMON: ENCOURAGEMENT IN GOD’S PROMISES

Second Sermon 2:1-9		
Question:	Twofold Response:	
How does this Temple compare with the Former Temple?	The nations will come and I will fill this House with glory	The latter glory of this House will be greater than the former

Haggai lived in a day of past glory. The Temple was being rebuilt, but it fell far short of the glory of the former Temple. The people who were working on its rebuilding could not help but to compare it to Solomon's Temple and note that it did not measure up to the original.

It is hard to continue in faithfulness when you can't see the results. This chapter is written to combat that kind of discouragement.

1. You can be encouraged by the Presence of God: *"But now take courage, Zerubbabel," declares the LORD, "take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage," declares the LORD, "and work; for I am with you," says the LORD of hosts. 5 As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear! (2:4-5).*

This is covenant language. The covenant that God made with His people when He brought them out of Egypt is that He would be with them. His presence was seen in the cloud by day and in the pillar of fire by night.

The Pentecost event took place when, instead of a cloud and a pillar of fire over the Tabernacle, the Spirit of God came upon man and woman alike and was manifested in flaming tongues of fire over each person.

There is a lesson here. It is that the same Spirit that led the Israelites through the wilderness is with you personally today. This truth has several ramifications:

- If God's Spirit is with you, then you do not have to be afraid of anything. The Lord is bigger than any of your problems and, as Paul asks in Romans 8, "If God is for us, then who can possibly be against us?"
- If God's Spirit is with you, then you can attempt great things with confidence that the One who is with you can see you through.

I must insert a cautionary disclaimer here. When I speak of doing great things, I am not speaking of greatness in the way the world sees greatness. God's presence is no guarantee that you are going to receive a financial raise or a job promotion. It doesn't mean you are going to marry the prom queen or the millionaire. It does not say that you are going to drive an expensive car or live in a luxurious home.

I am speaking of doing great things for God and for His kingdom and that often has a quality of greatness that is exactly the opposite of the way the world sees greatness.

At the same time, Jesus said: *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father* (John 14:12).

2. You can be encouraged by the Power of God: *For thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. 7 And I will shake all the nations* (2:6-7).

God shook the heavens and the earth...

- ☐ At creation
- ☐ At the flood
- ☐ At Sinai
- ☐ When Jesus came, there was a star in the sky, the sun turned black, there was an earthquake.

But the greatest shaking of all was not physical. It was spiritual. At Pentecost there was a shaking of the nations. They were shaken so that they might enter an unshakable kingdom.

The shaking of the heavens and the earth was done in the same way that the wind might shake a tree that is full of ripened fruit. The wind blows and it shakes the tree and its branches and the fruit literally falls to the ground.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews quotes this passage to speak of the eternal kingdom to which we are called.

See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. 26 And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven."

And this expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe (Hebrews 12:25-28).

God has "shaken things up" so that you might enter into something that is unshakable. This is a promise of security. It means that you have something that all the forces of darkness cannot take from you.

Is God shaking things up in your life? Have you found yourself recently removed from your comfort zone? Do you find the ongoing changes in the world and maybe even in the church to be distressing? There is a message of hope here. It is that God is shaking things up so that He might bring about that which is unshakeable.

3. You can be encouraged by the Possessions of God: *“And I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations; and I will fill this house with glory,” says the LORD of hosts. 8 The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,” declares the LORD of hosts (2:7-8).*

Are you having problems with your finances? Have you been wishing that you had a rich uncle? You do have a rich Father -- all of the gold and silver belongs to him. He has blessed you with everything that you need.

Notice how that silver and gold and wealth are described as coming to Him. They are brought by the nations.

This was very literally fulfilled in Haggai's day. The very people who had opposed the rebuilding of the Temple were ordered by the Persian King Darius to pay the full cost of the rebuilding of the Temple from the royal revenues in their own taxation district.

Moreover, I issue a decree concerning what you are to do for these elders of Judah in the rebuilding of this house of God: the full cost is to be paid to these people from the royal treasury out of the taxes of the provinces beyond the River, and that without delay (Ezra 6:8).

I believe this verse also to have a long range application. God has shaken the nations and they have come with their gold and their silver. That is US. We are not only the recipients of the wealth of the Lord, we are also the means by which that wealth is distributed.

The church in the United States is a wealthy church. But we are not called to come and hoard our wealth. We are mere stewards. We are called to be the means by which the Lord blesses His church universal.

4. You can be encouraged by the Peace of God: *“The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,” says the LORD of hosts, “and in this place I shall give peace,” declares the LORD of hosts (2:9).*

It is true that the Temple became more glorious in the days of Herod the Great.

But I do not believe this to be a prophecy only of Herod's Temple. It is a prophecy of Christ. He is the prince of peace and the manifestation of the real glory of God.

What made the Temple glorious? It was not the gold or the silver. It was the presence of God. God's presence was manifested in a baby. Jesus came to manifest the presence of God to men. He is the Immanuel -- the One who is God with us.

He is the One who came to be the Prince of Peace. Islam often presents itself as though it were a religion of peace. But the story of Mohammed is not a story of peace. On the other hand, when Peter whacked off the ear of the high priest's servant, Jesus told him to put his sword away. Jesus came to bring peace. He brought peace by dying.

THIRD SERMON: GOD'S CLEANSING WORK OF GOD

I've spent a large part of my life as a career fire fighter and I can attest that fire fighting is often dirty work. The soot and the grease and the grime seem to permeate everything. Many a time I have taken a shower, only to find that the smoke odor continues to exude from the pores of my skin.

The Bible teaches us that we have a cleansing problem. It is called sin. There are some today who do not like to use that word, but it is a perfectly legitimate word. To ignore it would be like a fire fighter coming out of a working fire and ignoring the fact that he was contaminated by the scene in which he had been working. You may choose to ignore the sin in your life, but it will not ignore you.

The third sermon of Haggai deals with this issue of being clean from sin. It introduces the subject with a question.

Third Sermon 2:10-19		
Question:	Twofold Response:	
Does the Unclean produce that which is Clean?	Consider from this day: I have brought economic sanctions against you	Consider from this day: I will bless you

Haggai begins this sermon with a riddle. The riddle asks the question: "How does something that is unclean produce that which is clean?" The answer is obvious. It isn't possible.

This had direct application to that day when it came to the rebuilding of the Temple. The people were seeking to build an outward edifice of holiness, but they had not yet dealt with the inner sin in their own lives.

We often do the same thing. We work at the obvious outward problems in our lives and we pick away at those things that are not socially acceptable while ignoring that they are only indicators of a problem within.

How does something unclean produce something that is clean? And how can that which is clean come into contact with that which is unclean and not be contaminated by it?

This question points us to the gospel. It is in Christ that we find the answer to the riddle. God has produced in Him the means by which we can be made clean. This worked out in a very practical way in that day. It was the discipline of God upon His people that drove them back to Himself. Because of their repentance, they are now left with a promise. It is a promise of present and future blessing. There is coming One who will be able to touch the leper and the unclean and who will not be polluted by it, for He will cleanse the leper.

What Jesus does in the physical realm, He also does in the spiritual realm. He is the One who bore our sins upon Himself, yet He did so without becoming polluted by our sins. Though He paid the penalty for our sins, He did so without becoming a sinner. He is the Healer who heals without becoming a carrier of the disease.

EPILOGUE: CLOSING WORDS TO ZERUBBABEL

Then the word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month saying, ²¹ “Speak to Zerubbabel governor of Judah saying, ‘I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. ²² And I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the power of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down, everyone by the sword of another. ²³ On that day,’ declares the LORD of hosts, ‘I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you,’” declares the LORD of hosts. (Haggai 2:20-23).

Notice the closing promise of this book. It is that Zerubbabel would be made like a signet ring. A signet ring had a special use:

- It served as a person’s legal signature

There is a possible play on words with the previous verses. Verse 19 closed with the question: “Is the seed yet in the barn?” The name Zerubbabel literally means “seed of Babylon.”

- It validated royal authority when used to seal a document
- It was a guarantee of a future promise.

This is a significant promise, for it is the overturning of a curse that had been made back in the book of Jeremiah.

“As I live,” declares the LORD, “even though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were a signet ring on My right hand, yet I would pull you off; ²⁵ and I shall give you over into the hand of those who are seeking your life, yes, into the hand of those whom you dread, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans.” (Jeremiah 22:24-25).

The blessings of God had been taken away in the days of Coniah, but now there is a promise of their restoration under Zerubbabel. The promise is that Zerubbabel would be “like a signet ring.”

Where do you put a signet ring? On your right hand (see Jeremiah 22:24). That is where we find Jesus -- He is seated at the right hand of God. He is the fulfillment of this promise. He is the descendant of Zerubbabel who would be the signet ring of God.