

Haggai - Introduction & Background

Authorship

Authorship of Haggai is uncontested by scholars of all stripes. Because Haggai's name is mentioned 9x throughout the book (1:1,3,12-13; 2:1,10,13-14,20), it is assumed that he is the book's author. The book is also titled "Haggai" after its central character. The LXX entitles it *Aggios* while the Vulgate entitles it *Aggaeus*. The name Haggai is derived from the Hebrew word *hag*, which means festival or feast. His name is actually an abbreviated form of the word *Haggiah*, which means, "feast of Yahweh." Some have speculated that Haggai's name signifies that he was born on a major feast day, such as the Feast of Tabernacles. Although Haggai's second message was given during this feast (2:1), there is little evidence to support the notion that he was born on a particular feast day.

Despite the fact that nothing is known of his family or background, the book of Ezra corroborates his post-exilic ministry (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). There, he is portrayed as working alongside the younger prophet Zechariah in encouraging the exiles to rebuild the temple. Some have interpreted 2:3 as indicating that Haggai was alive when Solomon's temple was standing. According to this view, Haggai was one of the few who could remember the glory of the former temple. This would place him in his 70's or 80's at the time the prophecies contained in the book were uttered. However, it is unclear that Haggai was alive and in Judea prior to 586 BC. It is equally probable that he was born during the Babylonian captivity. Interestingly, some of the Psalms in the ancient versions of the OT are attributed to Haggai (Ps 137; 145-148 in the LXX and Ps 125-126; 145-147 in the Vulgate). However, this association probably has more to do with the connection between the prophets and the temple where the Psalms were sung rather than Haggai actually authoring these Psalms.

Date

Just as authorship of the book remains uncontested, the date of the book remains uncontested as well. According to the chronological information presented in the book, all four of its messages were given within four months of one another in the year 520 BC (1:1; 2:1,10,20). All of Haggai's prophecies were given during the second year of the Persian King Darius I, who ruled from 521-486 BC. The book was probably composed shortly after these prophecies were given. Because the temple was completed in 515 BC (Ezra 6:15) and because the book does not mention a rebuilt temple, the book was probably composed before 515 BC. Thus, a date of 520-515 BC for the writing of the book seems appropriate.

Place of Writing and Recipients

Haggai's ministry took place in *Jerusalem*. Jerusalem was the logical place of Haggai's ministry since he called the exiles to rebuild the temple and the temple had to be rebuilt on the temple mount in Jerusalem where Solomon's temple once stood. Haggai's reference to the hills (1:8,11) also identifies Jerusalem as his place of ministry since there were no large mountains in Babylon. Since Haggai likely wrote the book not long after he uttered his prophecies, Jerusalem is the logical place for the composition of the book. Haggai *addressed* various individuals and groups in his prophecies. Among them was Zerubbabel, who was the governor of Judah (1:1; 2:21), and Joshua the high priest of Judah (1:1). Haggai also addressed the remnant that had returned from Babylonian Captivity (2:2) and the Jerusalem priests (2:11).

Occasion for Writing

Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Jewish temple in his third and final siege in 586 BC. The removal of the temple caused enormous damage to the religious life of the nation since so much of Jewish worship under the Mosaic system was connected with the temple. Although the Jews could still pray toward Jerusalem (Dan 6:10), much of their religious life was injured with the temple's destruction. On October 12, 539 BC, Babylon fell to the Medo-Persian Empire (Dan 5). In 538 BC, the Persian king Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their land so that they could rebuild their temple (Ezra 1:2-4; 6:3-5). Curiously, a parallel command from Cyrus has been found on a clay tablet. This command initiated the first of the three Jewish returns from Babylon. These returns are distinguished as follows:

	Date	Persian king	Jewish leader	Scripture	Purpose
1st return	538–515 B.C.	Cyrus	Zerubbabel	Ezra 1–6; Isaiah 44:28	Rebuilding the temple
2nd return	458–456 B.C.	Artaxerxes	Ezra	Ezra 7–10	Reforming the people
3rd return	444–432 B.C.	Artaxerxes	Nehemiah	Nehemiah	Rebuilding the wall

Haggai, Zechariah, Joshua the high priest, and a 50,000 member Jewish remnant participated in the first return under Zerubbabel, grandson of Jehoiachin (1 Chr 3:17-19). Upon their return, the exiles built towns and an altar in preparation for the Feast of Tabernacles, which began September 6, 537 BC. Levitical sacrifices were reinstated on the rebuilt altar (Ezra 3:1-6). In the second year after the return from Babylon (April 29, 536 BC), the exiles laid the foundation for the temple and began the work of rebuilding it (Ezra 3:6-10; 5:16). However, the enemies of Judah and Benjamin (Ezra 4:1) stopped the work on the temple. The Samaritans hindered the building of the temple (Ezra 4:4-5) and eventually wrote a letter to the Persian king pressuring the Jews to cease from building.

Because the nation found it more convenient to stop building than to fight their enemies, work on the temple halted (Ezra 4:24). Apathy quickly set in. With their kingdom hopes dashed (Deut 30) as well as the discouragement they undoubtedly suffered over exchanging a comfortable life in Babylon for an unproductive land (1:9-11; 2:15-18) full of enemies, the exiles became more preoccupied with their own homes than with rebuilding the temple (1:4). They began to make excuses such as the time was not right for the rebuilding of the Lord's house (1:2). Thus, the temple foundation stood idle until God raised up Haggai and Zechariah to exhort the nation to complete the building project (Ezra 5:1-2). In response to the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah, the exiles resumed building the temple sixteen years (520 BC) after they had stopped (1:15). The temple was completed in 516 BC during the sixth year of Darius (Ezra 6:15).

Haggai and Zechariah were contemporaries, whose ministries overlapped:

Date	Haggai	Zechariah
8/29/520	1 st sermon (1:1-11)	
9/21/520	Temple building resumed (1:12-15)	
10/17/520	2 nd sermon (2:1-9)	
10-11/520		Beginning of ministry (1:1-6)
12/18/520	3 rd and 4 th sermon (2:10-23)	
2/15/519		8 visions (1:7-6:8)
12/17/518		Delegation from Bethel (7:1)

Thus, Zechariah's messages began in between Haggai's second and third message. Because Zechariah was younger than Haggai, his ministry lasted longer than Haggai's. While the pre-exilic prophets focused on a religious yet disobedient people, the situation confronted by the post-exilic prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) was different. The people were discouraged and apathetic. They saw little need to rebuild the temple and follow the Mosaic cult. Thus, the nation was in danger of being assimilated into the surrounding nations, losing its heritage, and stifling the messianic line.

Purpose and Message

Haggai's *purpose* in prophesying and writing was to encourage the Jews to begin rebuilding the temple after a sixteen-year hiatus. He confronted the nation's misplaced priorities by reminding them that the curses would be removed and blessings would be ushered in when they placed God's interests over their own. Thus, Haggai's *message* is that the exiles must align their priorities with God's priorities by rebuilding the temple so that He can unleash personal and national blessings upon them. This message would encourage the people not only to complete the temple, but it would also exhort them to continued obedience throughout the post-exilic era.

Structure

The structure of the book revolves around the four messages given by Haggai.

Message	1	2	3	4
Scripture	1:1-15	2:1-9	2:10-19	2:20-23
Time	8/29/520 <i>or</i> 1st day of 6th month of 2nd-year	10/17/520 <i>or</i> 21st day of 7th month of 2nd-year	12/18/520 <i>or</i> 24th day of 9th month of 2nd-year	12/18/520 <i>or</i> 24th day of 9th month of 2nd-year
Focus	Completion of the latter temple	Glory of the latter temple	Present blessing through obedience	Future blessing through promise

Topic	Temple of God	Temple of God	Blessings of God	Blessings of God
Emphasis	Present rebuke	Future encouragement	Present rebuke	Future encouragement
Addressee	Zerubbabel, Joshua	Zerubbabel, Joshua, remnant	Priests	Zerubbabel

Unique Characteristics

The Book of Haggai boasts several outstanding characteristics. First, Haggai represents one of the few "successful" OT prophets. He achieved quick results. After just 23 days his hearers had made steps toward erasing 16 years of neglect. Second, Haggai is the first prophet of the post-exilic era. Third, the scope of Haggai's message is short. All four messages were spoken within four months of one another. Fourth, other than Obadiah, Haggai is the shortest Old Testament prophet. Fifth, Haggai lacks the vivid imagery and poetry exhibited by other prophets. Rather, his literary style is concise and direct. Sixth, Haggai demonstrates a great awareness of his divine calling. He uses the phrase "thus saith the Lord" or an equivalent expression 26x in just 38 verses. Seventh, Haggai emphasizes serving God before personal interests results in blessing (Matt 6:33). Eighth, the book contains numerous startling eschatological predictions (2:7,9,22-23). Ninth, Haggai emphasizes the preservation of the Jewish culture in order to accomplish God's redemptive program. According to Haggai, aspects of Jewish culture that needed preservation included not only the second temple (2:9) but also the Davidic line (2:23). Tenth, Haggai is one of the most precise prophets in terms of furnishing a date for his prophecies. Other prophets also exhibiting this characteristic include Zechariah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Perhaps these prophets excelled in this discipline because of the annalistic historical style of Neo Babylonian and Persian times. Interestingly, the historical books written in this era, such as Ezra and Nehemiah, exhibit this pattern as well.

Messianic Prophecy in Haggai

One potential messianic prophecy is found in 2:7 where it predicts the desired of all nations will come to the temple. Jerome, the Rabbis, and even Wesley's famous song "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" interpreted this reference as a messianic prophecy. However, in modern times, many have rejected the messianic interpretation and instead have opted to interpret the phrase as "desirable things." This latter view seems supported from the immediate context, which speaks of material things (2:8). In other words, "desired of all

nations" is a metonymy for material riches that will come into the temple. Isaiah 60:7, 13, 17 furnishes a similar prophecy of the wealth of the nations entering the temple.

Another possible messianic prophecy is found in 2:9, which speaks of the latter temple's glory exceeding the glory of Solomon's temple. It is arguable that Christ fulfilled this prophecy since many aspects of Christ's ministry were connected with the second temple (Matt 24:1; Luke 2:41-50; John 2:12-22). A final messianic prophecy can be found in 2:23 where God promises to make Zerubbabel His signet ring. This prophecy explains why both gospel writers who mention messianic genealogies also take pains to mention Zerubbabel in these genealogies (Matt 1:12; Luke 3:27).

Outline

I. First message: call to rebuild Temple (Haggai 1:1-15)

(1) Introductory information (1:1)

(A) Date: first day, sixth month, second-year of Darius (8/29/520) (1:1a)

(B) Author: Haggai (1:1b)

(C) Recipients (1:1c-d)

(a) Zerubbabel: Governor of Judah (1:1c)

(b) Joshua: high priest (1:1d)

(2) Prophetic rebuke (1:2-15)

(A) Peoples' excuse recited (1:2)

(B) Haggai rebukes the people for building their own homes and not the Lord's (1:3-4)

(C) Curses on Israel for not rebuilding the Temple (1:5-6)

(a) Plea to consider their ways (1:5)

(b) Covenant curses (1:6a-e)

(i) Harvest (1:6a)

(ii) Food (1:6b)

(iii) Drink (1:6c)

(iv) Clothing (1:6d)

(v) Money (1:6e)

(D) More curses on Israel for not rebuilding (1:7-11)

(a) Plea to consider their ways (1:7)

(b) Plea to rebuild the Temple (1:8)

(c) Covenant curses (1:9-11)

(i) Harvest (1:9)

(ii) Drought (1:10-11)

(E) People's response (1:12-15)

(a) Those who obeyed (1:12)

(i) Zerubbabel (1:12a)

- (ii) Joshua (1:12b)
 - (iii) Remnant (1:12c)
- (b) God promises His presence (1:13)
- (c) Resumption of building Temple (1:14-15)
 - (i) Participants (1:14)
 - (ii) Date: 24 day, sixth month, second-year (9/21/520) (1:15)
- II. Second message: encouragement in view of future blessings (Haggai 2:1-9)
 - (1) Date (21st day of the seventh month)-(10/17/520) (2:1)
 - (2) Problem: builders discouraged because of the inferiority of the present Temple (2:2-3)
 - (3) Message of encouragement (2:4-9)
 - (A) Haggai exhorts builders to take heart because God's past covenant brings His presence (2:4-5)
 - (B) Encouragement through promise of future Temple glory (2:6-9)
 - (a) God's promise to shake creation (2:6)
 - (b) Promise of future Temple wealth from the nations (2:7-8)
 - (c) Promise of future Temple glory (2:9a)
 - (d) Promise of a future peace (2:9b)
- III. Third message: call to moral purity (Haggai 2:10-19)
 - (1) Date: 24th day, ninth month, second-year (12/18/520) (2:10)
 - (2) Illustrations and application (2:11-14)
 - (A) First illustration: purity touching impurity does not create purity (2:11-12)
 - (B) Second illustration: impurity touching purity creates impurity (2:13)
 - (C) Application: Temple stones touching people did not create pure people but impure people touching Temple stones could corrupt the stones (2:14)
 - (3) Reminder of past covenant curses resulting from impurity (2:15-17)
 - (4) Promise of future covenant blessings for purity (2:18-19)
- IV. Fourth message: promise of future exaltation of Zerubbabel (Haggai 2:20-23)
 - (1) Date: 24th day, ninth month, second-year (12/18/520) (2:20)
 - (2) God's future intervention into history (2:21-22)
 - (A) Effect on creation (2:21)
 - (B) Effect on rulers (2:22a)
 - (C) Effect on armies (2:22b)
 - (3) God's promise to vest Zerubbabel with future authority (2:23)

Introduction

Haggai was one of three post-exile prophets (Zechariah, Malachi). Haggai and Zechariah were contemporaries, while Malachi wrote about 100 years later. No doubt that Haggai and Zechariah knew each other, as they are both mentioned in Ezra (Ezra 5:1-2; 6:14) as being encouragers of the people in the rebuilding of the Temple.

Author

Haggai means "the festive one"; it's from the same Hebrew root where "festival" and "feast" are derived. Nothing is known about Haggai's family.

Audience

The believing Remnant of the Jewish people who had returned to the Land after the Babylonian Captivity and began rebuilding the temple. They cleared the temple court of rubble and replaced the altar of burnt offerings on its base, thus allowing the daily sacrifices to begin.

In the spring of the next year the foundations of the temple had been laid (Ezra 3:10), then the troubles began. Neighboring tribes—especially the Samaritans—were hostile (Ezra 4:24). Cyrus died in battle, and his successor Cambyses [also called Ahasuerus (Ezra 4:6)] was pressured to stop the work.

When the work ceased (for 15 years), the people returned to their private affairs, and gradually became accustomed to worshiping among the ruins of the once-great temple. For 15 years, the foundation lay there but nothing more was done. The desire to rebuild died out and they became reconciled to remaining the secular occupants in an impoverished land. They were the right people, living in the right place, wanting to do the right work, and for the right reasons. But their priorities were not right. They were caught up in their own pursuits. They were living for themselves rather than for God's glory.

When Darius Hystaspes became the new emperor of the Medo-Persian Empire, he favored rebuilding the Temple, so there was no longer any royal opposition to it. Now the problem was the Jewish people themselves. They had lost their zeal. In the second year of Darius Hystaspes, Haggai was called to be a prophet, and God used both Haggai and Zechariah to move the people to complete the Temple (Ezra 5:1). Eventually, the Temple was completed (Ezra 6:14-15).

Historical Setting

The historical setting is outlined in the Book of Ezra. The Medo-Persian Empire had replaced the Babylonian Empire and the 70 years of the Babylonian Captivity had ended. Cyrus, the emperor of the Medo-Persian Empire, allowed the Jews to return to their Land. But only a minority of Jews chose to do so.

The minority who returned began to rebuild the Temple in order to reinstitute the worship service required under the Mosaic Law (Ezra 3:8). Initially, that was the priority because there had been no sacrifices apart from the Temple, for 70 years there had been no sacrificial system. According to Ezra 3:10, in a short period of time they completed the laying down of the foundation. But suddenly, opposition arose from Gentiles in the surrounding area, and because of this, they ceased their building (Ezra 4:24). They were given orders to proceed no further, and for 15 years they did no more work on the Temple. For fifteen years the foundation lay there, completed, but nothing more was done about it. For fifteen years, people could see the foundation, but no building was being erected upon that foundation. When Darius Hystaspes became the new emperor of the Medo-Persian Empire, he favored the rebuilding of the Temple, and there was no longer any royal opposition to it. Now the problem was no longer with the Gentile rulers, but with the Jewish people themselves. They had lost their zeal concerning the rebuilding of the Temple. In the second year of the reign of Darius Hystaspes, Haggai was called to be a prophet, and God used both Haggai and Zechariah to move the people to complete the Temple (Ezra 5:1). Eventually, the Temple was completed through the encouragement of the prophetic messages of

Date Written? - Sept-Dec, 520 BC

Haggai 1:1 states that he wrote in the second year of Darius. This is Darius Hystaspes, and the second year of Darius Hystaspes was 520 BC. Several times that year, during a three-to four-month period, the Word of God came to Haggai. The first message from God came in the sixth month of the Jewish calendar, which corresponds to September on the modern calendar. The last message he received came in the ninth month of the Jewish calendar, which corresponds to December on the modern calendar. Thus, Haggai's prophetic ministry extended over only a three-to four-month period, from September to December of 520 BC.

There were three Post-exilic Prophets: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Haggai and Zechariah were contemporary prophets to the Jews who returned from the Babylonian Captivity, whereas Malachi lived almost a century later. Both Haggai and Zechariah had the same burden: to encourage the Jewish people to complete the rebuilding of the Temple. While Haggai's prophetic ministry lasted only three to four months, Zechariah's ministry lasted much longer. During that short period, no doubt Haggai and Zechariah knew each other. In fact, they are mentioned together in the Book of Ezra as being the encouragers of the people in the rebuilding of the Temple.

Purpose

Both Haggai and Zechariah had the same burden: to encourage the Jewish people to complete the rebuilding of the temple. Haggai's ministry lasted only a few months; Zechariah's ministry lasted much longer.

Theme

Rebuilding the temple.

Outline