

HAGGAI

Author: Haggai

Date: 520 B.C.

Haggai is the first of the three post-exilic prophets, the other two being Zechariah and Malachi. This is a strong series of four sermons by Haggai to encourage the Jews to complete the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. The work on the temple had ceased, and the people had become more concerned with the beautification of their own houses than the building of the central sanctuary of God. Because of their own misplaced priorities, their labors cannot be blessed by God. When the people put the Lord first by completing the task He set before them, then His blessing will once again be upon them. Haggai frequently tells the people, "Consider your ways." (1:5, 7; 2:15, 18)

Historical background: In 605 B.C. the Babylonians made their first siege on Jerusalem taking some of the Jews as captives. In 586 B.C., Jerusalem fell to Babylon, the temple was destroyed, and the Jews were taken captive. In 539 B.C., Babylon fell to the Medo-Persian Empire (as prophesied by Jeremiah and Daniel). In 538 B.C., Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their land and rebuild their temple. (Isaiah had prophesied of Cyrus doing this back in 688 B.C. – Isaiah 44:28.) Approximately 50,000 Jews returned to Jerusalem and in 536 B.C., work on the temple commenced. (Zerubbabel led the first group of exiles back to Jerusalem to begin the rebuilding. Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, was the godly grandson of the wicked King Jehoiachin of Judah. Zerubbabel was appointed governor over the province of Judah. The rebuilt or second temple was known as Zerubbabel's temple.) The returning exiles met strong opposition from the Samaritans in the land, and work on the temple stopped at 534 B.C. It was in this context that God called His prophets Haggai and Zechariah to the same task of urging the people to complete the temple. Haggai had returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel and evidently lived in Jerusalem.

Theme: The Jewish remnant must reorder its priorities and complete the temple before it can expect the blessings of God.

Key verses: "It is time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" (1:4) " 'The glory of the latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the Lord God of hosts. 'And in this place I will give you peace.' " (2:9)

Outline

- I. A Call to Rebuild the Temple (1:1-15)
- II. A Call to Courage (2:1-9)
- III. A Call to Obedience (2:10-19)
- IV. A Promise of Future Blessings (2:20-23)

Application: This small book is filled with challenge and promise, reminding us of God's claim on our lives and our priorities. Like the Jews of Haggai's time, we tend to place a high priority on personal comfort rather than God's work and true worship. When we give God first place in our lives, He is pleased and promises strength, guidance, and blessings. Listen to God, and do what He tells you to do.