



Haggai

This is a prophecy by the prophet Haggai which encourages those who have recently returned from exile in Babylon to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Haggai was upset that people were living in fine houses while God's temple remained in ruins and argued that the people's lack of prosperity was attributable to the temple being in ruins. Haggai declared that God would make the second temple greater and more glorious than the first. It is similar in some parts of its message to its companion book Zechariah.



How long will it take?

Reading time: 7 mins
Short of time? Just read 1.1-11; 2.1-9



Genre

Prophecy



Anything tricky?

Haggai links the prosperity of the people to their building of the temple for God: you may need to reflect as you read on how you feel about this.



Inspiring quotes

⁴ Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, ⁵ according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear.

(Haggai 2.4-5)

⁶ You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes.

⁷ Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider how you have fared.

(Haggai 1.6-7)



About the Author

The prophecies come from Haggai but, as with many of the other prophets, it is likely that they were written down later by someone else.

What do we know about him?

Very little, he is referred to as a prophet in 5.1 and 6.14 but other than that, nothing is known about him outside of this book.



About the times

The exiles were allowed to return from Babylon by King Cyrus in 538 bc. The first exiles began to return shortly after this. Haggai (and its companion book Zechariah) comes from this period and reflect a little of what it was like in that time.

This marks the start of the second temple period which stretches from the time of Haggai until its destruction in ad 70 by the Romans.

What were people feeling?

Reading between the lines of Haggai and Zechariah the people were feeling an odd mix of hopeful (due to the exile ending) and misery (since their return was not as comfortable and prosperous as they had hoped).

Other books set around this time

The very end of 2 Chronicles; Zechariah



What kind of Book is it?

Prophecy. This is a prophecy with a clear aim, and, indeed, outcome. Haggai argued strongly for the rebuilding of the temple and the book recounts that he was successful in this. As a result the book is a mix of prophecies and narratives.



How is it structured?

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 1.1-11 | Prophetic call to rebuild the temple |
| 1.12-15 | The people obey and begin to build it |
| 2.1-9 | God promised that the second temple would be glorious |
| 2.10-19 | Haggai asks the priests to declare what is clean or unclean |
| 2.20-23 | Zerubbabel identified as the chosen one |



Look out for...

Haggai weaves together challenge and hope in his message. Look out for these twin themes as you read. What challenges does he offer? And what hope does he hold out?

The temple is vitally important for Haggai – look out for what he says about it in his messages.

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Ask yourself why you think the temple was so important for him.



What could this mean for me?

Right at the heart of Haggai is the message of the importance of honouring God as much as we take care of ourselves. Reflect on whether you honour God as much as you care for yourself, your family and your friends.



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- Why do you think the rebuilding of the temple was so important to Haggai? What did he feel was lacking while it was in ruins?
- How important are buildings to you in your worship of God? For some people they are vital, central and essential to worship; for others entirely irrelevant. Talk about how you feel about it.
- What might we do today to signal that we are honouring God and placing him at the centre of what we do? For Haggai it was rebuilding the temple, what might it be for us?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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