Haggai
Scripture: Haggai
Code: MSB37

Title

The prophecy bears the name of its author. Because his name means “festal one,” it is suggested that Haggai was born on a feast day. Haggai is the second shortest book in the OT (Obadiah is shorter) and is quoted by the NT once (cf. Heb. 12:26).

Author and Date

Little is known about Haggai apart from this short prophecy. He is mentioned briefly in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14, on both occasions in conjunction with the prophet Zechariah. The lists of refugees in Ezra mention nothing of Haggai; there are no indications of his parentage or tribal ancestry. Nor does history provide any record of his occupation. He is the only person in the OT with the name, although similar names occur (cf. Gen. 46:16; Num. 26:15; 2 Sam. 3:4; 1 Chr. 6:30). Furthermore, Hag. 2:3 may suggest that he too had seen the glory of Solomon’s temple before it was destroyed, making him at least 70 years of age when writing his prophecy. There is no ambiguity or controversy about the date of the prophecy. The occasion of each of his 4 prophecies is clearly specified (1:1; 2:1; 2:10; 2:20), occurring within a 4 month span of time in the second year (ca. 520 B.C.) of Persian king Darius Hystaspes (ca. 521–486 B.C.). Haggai most likely had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon with Zerubbabel 18 years earlier in 538 B.C.

Background and Setting

In 538 B.C., as a result of the proclamation of Cyrus the Persian (cf. Ezra 1:1–4), Israel was allowed to return from Babylon to her homeland under the civil leadership of Zerubbabel and the spiritual guidance of Joshua the High-Priest (cf. Ezra 3:2). About 50,000 Jews returned. In 536 B.C., they began to rebuild the temple (cf. Ezra 3:1–4:5) but opposition from neighbors and indifference by the Jews caused the work to be abandoned (cf. Ezra 4:1–24). Sixteen years later Haggai and Zechariah were commissioned by the Lord to stir up the people to 1) not only rebuild the temple, but also to 2) reorder their spiritual priorities (cf. Ezra 5:1–6:22). As a result, the temple was completed 4 years later (ca. 516 B.C.; cf. Ezra 6:15).

Historical and Theological Themes

The primary theme is the rebuilding of God’s temple, which had been lying in ruins since its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. By means of 5 messages from the Lord, Haggai exhorted the people to renew their efforts to build the house of the Lord. He motivated them by noting that the drought and crop failures were caused by misplaced spiritual priorities (1:9–11). But to Haggai, the rebuilding of the temple was not an end in itself. The temple represented God’s dwelling place, His manifest presence with His chosen people. The destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar followed the departure of God’s dwelling glory (cf. Ezek. 8–11); to the prophet, the

rebuilding of the temple invited the return of God's presence to their midst. Using the historical situation as a springboard, Haggai reveled in the supreme glory of the ultimate messianic temple yet to come (2:7), encouraging them with the promise of even greater peace (2:9), prosperity (2:19), divine rulership (2:21,22), and national blessing (2:23) during the Millennium.

Interpretive Challenges

The most prominent interpretive ambiguity within the prophecy is the phrase "the Desire of All Nations" (2:7). Although many translations exist, there are essentially only two interpretations. Pointing to "The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine" (2:8), as well as to Is. 60:5 and Zech. 14:14, some contend that it refers to Jerusalem, to which the wealth of other nations will be brought during the Millennium (cf. Is. 60:11; 61:6). It seems preferable, however, to see a reference here to the Messiah, a Deliverer for whom all the nations ultimately long. Not only is this interpretation supported by the ancient rabbis and the early church, the mention of "glory" in the latter part of the verse suggests a personal reference to the Messiah (cf. Is. 40:5; 60:1; Luke 2:32).

Outline and Chronology

	Year	Month	Day
I. Rebuke for Disobedience (1:1-11)	2	6	1
II. Remnant Responds and Rebuilds (1:12-15)	2	6	24
III. Return of God's Glory (2:1-9)	2	7	21
IV. Religious Questions (2:10-19)	2	9	24
V. Reign of the Lord (2:20-23)	2	9	24

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